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THE HEIR OF LINNE

"The bonnie heir, the weel-faured heir,
And the wearie heir o' Linne;
Yonder he stands at his father's gate,
And naebody bids him come in!"

Old Scottish Ballad.

THE HEIR OF LINNE

B2219

BY

ROBERT BUCHANAN

AUTHOR OF

"GOD AND THE MAN," "THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD," ETC.

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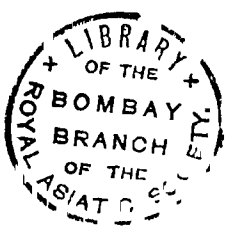

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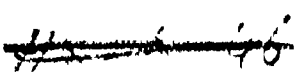

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1888

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THE HEIR OF LINNE.

BOOK THE FIRST.

THE LAIRD OF LINNE.

CHAPTER I.

WILLIE THE PREACHER.

On the afternoon of an autumn day, forty odd years ago, a singular scene might have been witnessed in the streets of the seaside town of Linne, on the south-west coast of Scotland. Townsfolk, fishermen, fish-wives, old men and women, lads and lasses, were gathered in a crowd near the Cross in the main street, gaping, laughing, and jeering, while following an extraordinary-looking figure who flourished in one hand a long, ragged stick, attached to which was a sort of banner, composed of an old towel or dish-cloth, and held in the other a huge Scots bonnet, very much the worse of

wear. He shambled slowly along, bareheaded and barefooted, talking loudly as he went, and now and then pausing to address the crowd, in tones now shrill and strident, now low and pitiful, according to the nature of his discourse.

He was a man about forty, but he might have passed for sixty, so worn and woe-begone, so grey and wild, did he appear; but his step was strong and springy, and, despite his awkward gait, he had all the vigour of one in his prime. In walking, he bent forward, narrowing chest and shoulders, but when he paused, flourishing his banner and addressing the crowd, he drew himself to his full height of six feet upwards. Talking, gesticulating, flourishing his arms in the air, with his ragged coat blowing in the wind and showing a hairy, naked breast and sinewy throat and arms, he continued on his way, till he paused at the Cross, and stepping on the stone step, stood towering a full head and shoulders over the little sea of heads that were turned up to hear him.

Meanwhile the cry was running from door to door, "Willie Macgillvray's hereawa'! Prophet Willie's preaching

up and doon the town!" People ran from the shops where they were making purchases, the herring fishers left their nets on the shore and their boats on the quay, the landlord of the Tam o' Shanter inn came out to his door, the ragged children ran from every lane and alley with eager cries.

His back to the old Cross, his face to the sea, the man lifted up his right hand flourishing the banner, and addressed the crowd.

"In the name of the prophet, Macgillvray! In the name of Willie the Hermit! hearken to the words o' wisdom, spoken to a foolish and a feeble generation! Open your lugs, ye rogues and ye hizzies, and take heed to the emblem I wave before ye—ay, look upon it and take heed!"

A huge roar of laughter interrupted him.

"We're taking heed, Willie!" cried a voice. "What is't? A dish-cloot, Willie, my man?"

The prophet's eyes twinkled strangely.

"Ay, a dish-clout, and what for no'? What would you have, Tammas, ye sinner? Would you have a brand from

your smithy fire? Would ye have the Royal Lion o' Scotland, emblazoned in gold on a crimson flag o' the silk? Would ye have a green tree, ye grinning deevil, or a kail runt from the garden? I take my flag where I find it—a sark bleaching in a hedge, or a young lassock's petticoat from the linen-press, or an old wife's hushion from the arm-chair! Away, ye limmers! away, ye sinners! away, ye scum o' Egypt and o' Scotland, and get ye dish-clouts and cold water from the well, and wash your souls clean! Never heed your faces this day—look to your souls, for the Lord's coming down this way, and I, Willie Macgillvray, am his prophet!"

Here, suddenly sinking his voice and changing his tone, he held out the great bonnet, and continued like a mendicant—

"All that I ask for my pains is one bawbee! Gold I cannot take, and silver I will not take; but I seek just one bawbee from each and all."

There seemed to be no response to his solicitation. The people nudged each other, and grinned, and laughed; but not a copper was forthcoming—so that the voice again pealed shrill and angry,

and the banner was waved impatiently in the air.

"What, ye limmers, nothing! Not a doit, not a bawbee! Will I curse ye with bell, book, and candle, like a priest o' Rome! Will I sneevel out to ye the threat o' hell-fire, like the clocking hens o' the kirk! No, ye limmers; no, ye hizzies; no, ye ignorant loons; I'll tell ye the true tidings that came to me from the mouths o' the leaders o' mankind. In the name of the prophet, Willie Macgillvray, who has sat at the feet of Robert Owen o' Lanark and drunken the words o' wisdom from the lips o' William Fulton o' Kilmarnock! There's one is coming to clean the world, and what for no' with a dish-clout! It's reeking and stinking with dirt! It's as foul as a midden and as black as a common sewer! Will you tell me that the auld wife o' Rome can clean it—she's tried her best for eighteen hundred years, and what's she done but spilt the pot into the fire and filled the house with reek and fume? Will you tell me that Rome can clean it, or Presbytery, or Free Kirk, or any kirk, for that's a lie! The one that is coming to do the job—with

a dish-clout in her hand—is neither bedizened like the Scarlet Woman, nor clad in silks and satins like a lady, nor ragged and dirty like *you*, ye drabs and fish-wives of the town! She is modest in her demeanour, and wise in her speech, and bonnie o' blee, with a sweet mouth and a loving cheek, and all she wears is the petticoat and short gown of a fair-hair'd lowland lass that milks the kye! Shall I tell ye what they call her? Will you hearken to her name? Her name, then, is Common Sense, own sister to Christian Charity, and first kissen by blood to Sisterly Love! Hearken to that, now! Hearken to that, ye that have no sense, and no charity, and no love!"

Here, just in the warmth of his argument, he stopped short, dropped his banner, and crooned most piteously—

"Lord preserve me, I'm awfu' dry! Who'll give Willie the Prophet two bawbees to kill the drouth?"

A loud roar greeted this sally. The smith who had previously spoken—a huge fellow, in his shirt-sleeves—then stepped forward—

"Sing us a song, Willie, my man, and I'll treat ye to half a mutchkin!"

The prophet looked at him with an expression full of mingled suspicion and approval.

"I ne'er can sing till my throat's wetted, Tammas! Oil my voice, and I'm your man!"

With a laugh and a nod, the smith strode away to a small public-house in the corner of the quay. Willie followed closely at his heels, and the crowd followed Willie. The smith and the preacher disappeared into the public-house, but, after a few minutes, emerged again, Willie wiping his mouth with the cuff of his ragged coat.

"Noo, Willie my man!" cried Vulcan; whereupon, without more ado, Willie sprang into the middle of the street, and in a loud voice, clear, though shrill, sang the following ditty:—

"Come sit down, my cronie, and gie me your crack,
Let the wind tak' the cares o' this life on its back;
Our hearts to despondency we ne'er will submit,
We've aye been provided for, and sae will we yet!
And sae will we yet, and sae will we yet;
When we fell, we aye gat up again, and sae will we yet!

"Let the glass keep its course, and gae merrily roun',
The sun has to rise tho' the moon should gae doon,
Till the house be rinnin' roun' about, 'tis time enough to flit;
When we fell we aye gat up again, and sae will we yet!
And sae will we yet, and sae will we yet;
When we fell, we aye gat up again, and sae will we yet!"

As the man sang, his face grew transformed, his wild eyes grew soft and dreamy, his whole manner inexpressibly sad and tender. There was no laughter now. The crowd listened as if spell-bound, and the smith, with a great gulp in his throat, threw a handful of coppers into the singer's hat, crying—

"Cover that, some of ye!"

In a moment, men and women pressed forward to shower halfpence into the hat, nor did the alms-giving cease, till the sum amounted to several shillings. Gathering the money up in his clenched hand, Willie thrust it into the breast-pocket of his coat, and then, with a skip and a jump, ran rapidly up the street, with a flock of shouting children at his heels.

Suddenly he paused in the middle of the road, in front of a man on horseback, who was coming along at a slow trot. The horse paused suddenly and swerved aside, nearly throwing the rider—a thin, clean-shaven, keen-eyed man of between forty and fifty—who uttered an angry exclamation, and aimed a blow with his riding-whip at the mendicant's bare head.

"Gently, laird, gently!" cried Willie, parrying the blow with his stick and seizing the horse's reins. "What ails you this bonnie morning?" Then, drawing back, and bowing low with mock reverence, he added, "Room for the laird o' Castle Hunger! Room there, you imps and loons, for the great man with his pouches fu' o' siller to gie to the poor!"

"Out of the way, you drunken fool!" said the horseman, with a scowl, while his horse planted its fore-legs firmly, and stood panting before the waving banner. "Do you wish me to break my neck?"

"Not for worlds, laird! Lord forbid I should rob creation of a shining light and an example! And you a lonely

man, without an heir! Who would inherit the flesh-pots and the red wines o' Castle Hunger, if the laird o' Linne died without issue, and broke his braw neck on the causey-stanes?"

Something in the words uttered, and more particularly in the manner of utterance, seemed to render the rider furious. With a sharp oath, he struck his horse smartly over the ears with his riding-whip, and forced it to spring forward, nearly overturning the mendicant in its career; then, at a hand gallop, he passed rapidly up the street and out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

ROBIN.

WILLIAM MACGILLVRAY, better known as Willie the Prophet, was one of those extraordinary characters only to be found in the kingdom of Scotland, and rapidly dying out even there. Regarded by many people as a harmless madman, and by those who knew him best as a strange compound of wild enthusiasm

and sly common sense, he was well-known everywhere on the south-west coast, where he led a mysterious kind of life, from hand to mouth. Mean and ragged as was his appearance, he was, nevertheless, a gentleman by birth, and in his early life had taken orders as a minister of the Scottish Church. If the truth must be told, drink had been at the bottom of his eccentricities. After certain outrageous performances in the pulpit, which had led to his expulsion from the only living he ever enjoyed, he had disappeared for several years, and been a wanderer on the face of the earth, extending his pilgrimage as far eastward as the Holy Land, and as far westward as the United States. Re-appearing in his native country at about the time when Owen of Lanark was inviting proselytes of all degrees to learn and teach the new doctrines of Socialism, he had joined the little band of Socialist missionaries; but his evil genius pursued him even here, and during an extraordinary passage of arms with a certain minister of the Church, whom he had invited to meet him on the platform in a three days' debate on

the thesis, "Whether or not orthodox Christianity has been an unmixed benefit to society," he had broken down so ignominiously under the influence of strong liquors, that even the Socialist party regarded him as a devil's advocate, and eagerly washed their hands of him. From that time forward, he led the life of a vagabond, roaming from place to place, and shelterless as a bird of the air; mobbed sometimes for his shocking heterodoxy, which he took no trouble to disguise, and which deeply offended the prejudices of most of the population, but protected generally by the good-humour of public opinion, which classed him, perhaps rightfully, as a harmless lunatic. In good truth, few of those who listened to him knew exactly what he was driving at, so mixed was his matter and so wild his mode of delivery on these occasions, when, leaving his retreats, he burst out into the streets and market-places, and proclaimed his prophetic vocation.

Those who knew, said that Willie was by no means so hare-brained as he pretended to be; and, for some reason or other, he had friends far and wide.

Pawky farmers, respectable and religious in all their belongings, welcomed Willie to their inglesides, and gave him a shake-down when he wanted it. Peasants and fishermen enjoyed his gifts of conversation and song-singing. His wants being few, there was always some one to minister to them, and he generally contrived to be of service to those who treated him with that kindly consideration.

His fits of prophesying and speechifying came on periodically, under the influence of the liquor which had been his lifelong bane. At other times, he came and went quietly enough, and was sufficiently shrewd to keep his wildest opinions to himself.

An hour or so after the scene, or scenes, described in the preceding chapter, Willie was wandering alone along the sea-shore beyond the town, trailing his banner along the ground like the tail of a dog in disgrace, and oscillating wildly in his gait. It was the close of a golden day, and the sun was setting in splendour upon the mountainous islands of the sea. Not a sound broke the stillness, save the occasional cry of

a hovering sea-gull or the lonely call of a curlew.

He walked on unsteadily, muttering to himself, till he had left the town far behind; then, pausing, and leaning on his stick, he looked backward with lack-lustre eyes. The distant houses, the dark quays, were reddening to the sunset, and one or two red-sailed herring-boats were beginning to creep out to the night's fishing on the almost windless sea. He turned with a sigh, and saw before him a craggy promontory, on the edge of which was a lonely lighthouse, the dim beacon of which had just been newly lit. Between the promontory and the path he had followed stretched many miles of rocky sands and reefs of crimson weed, left bare by the tide, which was at its lowest ebb.

He walked on for some minutes, then, pausing again, threw his banner down, and cast himself full length on the shingle, closed his eyes, and seemed to go to sleep. Presently, however, he sat upright, and, after passing his hand wearily across his brow, gazed at the sunset, with a look so long, so wistful, so dreamy and absent-minded, that it

was some time before he perceived that he was not alone.

Just above him, on the rough and scanty grass which fringed the shingle's edge, stood a tiny figure, looking down upon him, as silent and moveless as himself: a little boy of seven or eight years old, whose dress consisted of a single garment like a girl's frock—which indeed it might once have been—who wore neither shoes nor stockings, and whose long golden hair had no covering of any kind.

The child did not stir, but stood watching Willie with eyes as sad as his own, yet pitiful as well as wistful—till, drawn by some magnetic attraction of the little one's steadfast gaze, Willie started, looked round, and greeted him with a curious smile.

"Is that you, Robin?" he said gently. "I took you for a fairy, Robin, with the light shining on your bonnie golden hair, and your eyes of elfin blue. Come, and sit you here by my side."

The boy sprang down and seated himself on the loose shingle, gathering up the mingled sand and shells with one hand, but looking steadily into the man's face.

"What ails you, Robin?" asked Willie, a little uneasy under that steadfast gaze. "What brings ye here, and where have ye been?"

"Up the toon, Willie! I saw ye amang the folk, and followed you hereawa'."

Willie's face fell.

"I did not see you, Robin," he said softly.

"But I saw *you*, Willie; and I saw the folk making fun o' ye! and I thought shame o' ye when I saw ye drinking at the public-hoose!"

"I had just two glasses, Robin," replied the man, apologetically.

"Ye had mair than twa," said the boy, firmly. "Ye were drunk, Willie, and you're half-drunk *noo!*"

This was plain speaking with a vengeance, but Willie did not seem at all astonished. He looked at the child, smiled sadly, and then, reaching out his hand, passed it gently over his long golden hair.

"You're right, Robin—I'll not deny it! The spell was on me, and I yielded to the tempter, as you say. But I'm sober *now*, Robin! It's away like an ill dream!"

Still lightly smoothing the child's hair, he continued—

"But there are bonnie dreams as well as ill ones, Robin, my doo! It was a bonnie dream I had the noo, when you came gazing down upon me. I saw a bairn like yourself standing yonder at the gates o' brightness, and he had golden hair like this, and he was waving his two hands and beckoning me to come; and who think you was the bairn but wee Willie Macgillvray—Willie, as he was thirty years syne, a laddie like yourself, Robin? He's living yonder, and waiting till I come; for there's sense as well as nonsense in what the ministers say about 'except a man be born again, he canna' enter the kingdom o' heaven.'"

This curiously irrelevant discourse did not seem to astonish the listener at all. With the red light on his sweet face, Robin listened and nodded; then, pointing seaward, he cried—

"See till the sun, Willie! Is it no' bonnie?"

The wistful look grew on the man's wan features, which shone as if anointed.

"Yon's no' the sun, Robin!" he said, smiling. "Yon's GOD!"

The child started, as if somewhat afraid; then, catching his friend's smile, he cried—

"Is God in the sun, Willie?"

"God's *yonder*, Robin. I can see Him plain—His face, and His eyes, and His hair, and the shining of His smile. He's watching you and me and the world. Whether we're waking or sleeping, He's watching. Eh, but He's looking down on a heap o' dirt and wickedness, and wondering, maybe, why He made it! Could He not have made it better, and made folk wiser, and kept men for ever young, and saved them from the curse o' drink and such abominations? It must be an awful thing to be God, and to think of the responsibility! If I were God, I'd snuff the world out like a candle, and begin it all o'er again with a loving lad and lass, not naked, but decently clothed, and nae De'il to tempt them to wander astray!"

Even this raving did not disconcert or astonish the child, who, seeing an occasion to point a moral, interposed—

"The De'il made *whisky*, Willie! A'body kens that!"

"But God made the De'il!" cried Willie, with a grin, rising to his feet

The boy stooped down, and lifted the banner, placing the stick across his shoulder that he might bear its weight the more easily; then, side by side, the curiously assorted pair turned inland, crossed an arid patch of meadowland, and reached a narrow country road. By this time the gloaming had fallen, and here and there in the sky glimmered a star.

As they passed along, Willie began to sing, in the clear, pathetic tones peculiar to him—

> "I'm wearing awa', Jean,
> Like snaw when it's thaw, Jean;
> I'm wearing awa' to
> The Land o' the Leal."

All at once he paused and pointed up.

"Did ye ever see bees thronging, Robin, when a body drumm'd to them on an old tin can or a saucepan lid? Well, that's what He who made the world is doing now, only it's a kind of a harp He's playing (hearken, Robin, and ye can hear—a kind o' a still, small sound!) and the stars are thronging out with a hum! hum! hum! and flying round and round Him; and they'll throng and throng all night, aye growing thicker and brighter, till He gathers them into

his byke at the grey of the dawn. No man can count them; He canna' count them Himsel'; and yet, Robin my man, each star's a world like this, spinning round and round to yon heavenly playing! And the priest can blether, and the minister can sneevel, and the kirks battle together like the beasts o' the field, in the face of a sight like yon, in the hearing o' yon awful music. Look up again, Robin! Strain your een, my doo, and ye'll see glints of lights coming and going, and a shining as of a wonderfu' gate o' gold."

"I see the lights, Willie, but nae gate," said the child. "Are yon lights angels?"

"They're ghosts o' dead men and women coming and going, and watching the thronging o' the stars! Eh, Robin, it's a sad sight, yon, to a sinful man—a man sadden'd with the curse o' drink. But never believe the blether about angels and such like chimeras o' the poets! There's one Milton pictures them like muckle sodgers, with swords in their hands, and powder guns, and cannon to blow each other into space; and the De'il himself a kind o' Napoleon

Bonaparte, haranguing the sodgers and riding about on a charger—for all the world like a scene in a peep-show! That's foolishness, Robin—foolishness and havers! Yet the angels are men and women, and the de'ils are men and women! The one thing in yon daft chiel Swedenborg that pleases me is that he kenned this, and put it in his long-winded books!"

The boy gazed up in his face, wondering.

"I dinna like to look at the stars, Willie! They make me fear'd!"

"No wonder!" returned the man, standing bareheaded under the sky. "I said the same thing to Robert Owen once, when we were walking at gloaming on the banks o' Clyde. 'They tell me you're an atheist, Mr. Owen; can ye look up at yonder sky, and say without trembling "there is no God"?' Man, Robin, ye should have seen the look he gave me; and do ye ken what he replied? 'They call me an atheist, Mr. Macgillvray,' he said, 'because I believe in no God but goodness; because I worship no form of evil, and respect no tyranny, be it human or divine.' I took off my

bonnet till him then 'and there—like this! He was a grand man, Robert Owen, and dispelled a heap o' vulgar superstition."

Strange talk, surely, between a grown man and a child; but it was this very freedom of conversation on themes he did or did not understand that fascinated the boy. It never seemed to occur to Willie to explain anything, or to assume any inequality of ideas between himself and his companion. He talked away out of the fulness of his simple heart, as to a friend and equal; and though Robin scarcely followed his drift, there was between the two a perfectly sympathetic understanding.

"Come awa'!" whispered Robin, pulling the man by the coat-sleeve. "Mither's wanting ye, Willie. She sent me into the toon to seek ye."

Willie hastened on by the side of the boy, who ran to keep up with him.

"Why did you not tell me before that she was seeking me?"

"Because ye were drunk, Willie!" replied Robin, sententiously.

Willie took the home-thrust in silence;

but presently, as he hurried along, he muttered to himself—

"Not so drunk either! I had my ears and my eyes! . . . I ding'd the truth into them; and then I sang a bit song, and got a handsome collection. . . . And I scaur'd the laird o' Linne, on his road to Castle Hunger! . . . Not so drunk, but maybe drunk enough for one that was preaching the religion o' common sense."

"I saw ye scaur the laird," cried Robin, panting and looking up to him. "I thought he would hae been coupit frae the saddle."

"He would have gotten his deserts, Robin. I'll tell you this—a broken neck is better than a broken heart!"

CHAPTER III.

MOTHER AND SON.

FOLLOWING the rude country road, the two came out upon the open upland moor—a wild stretch of peat moss covered with blooming heather. The road now followed the side of a brawl-

ing mountain stream, with gleaming shallows and nut-brown pools, into which, here and there, the rowan or mountain-ash shook its scarlet berries and dipped its tasselled hair. Inland rose a line of low, heather-clad hills.

An angle of the road now shut out of sight the moonlit summer sea. The air was warm and scented with heather and thyme. All was so still and silent that the voice of the burn was distinctly heard, mingled with the faint, far-off cries of sheep upon the hills.

About a mile inland, on the very edge of the water, were some half-dozen detached cottages, built of stone quarried from the moss and roofed with straw. Each had a little kail-yard or kitchen-garden closed in by a stone wall. Towards one of the smallest of these cottages—a plain, whitewashed building of one story—Robin now led the way, and saw, as he approached the garden, a woman seated on a stool, spinning on an old-fashioned spinning-wheel.

"Are you there, Robin?" she cried, as he ran towards her. "I was wondering what kept you so long away."

Then, perceiving Willie the Preacher, she added, with a sigh—

"I'm glad Robin found you, sir. I was wearying to speak with you."

She was a pale, clear-complexioned woman of six or seven and twenty, dressed in the petticoat and short gown of the Scottish peasant. Her face was gentle and beautiful, but marked with lines of sorrow; her voice low and musical, with just a trace of local accent. Macgillvray approached her, lifting his hat, as to a lady, and gently took her hand.

"What is it, Lizzie, my woman?" he asked; adding, as she turned aside her head to conceal the fast-springing tears, "Courage, Lizzie! Whatever the trouble is, I'm here to teach you how to thole it."

She was about to answer him, but glanced nervously at the boy, who had crept to her side, and was playing with the wool upon the wheel.

"Robin, my lad," said Willie, "run down to the pool yonder, and see if the trout are rising. I'll maybe have a cast with the rod before I take the road."

With a smile and a nod, Willie ran down towards the burn, leaping over mossy stones and through deep clumps

of heather. Directly he was out of hearing, the woman covered her face with her apron, rocked herself to and fro, and sobbed convulsively.

"I see what it is, Lizzie," cried Willie, placing his hand upon her shoulder. "'Tis just the old trouble; but dry your eyes, and take counsel with one you ken to be your friend. I saw him this very afternoon," he continued, after a pause, "yonder in the town."

She threw the apron off her face, and looked up, with flushed cheeks.

"*Him?* Do you mean——"

"Whom should I mean but the lord of Linne? He's back from Edinburgh at last."

"And what then, sir?" cried the woman, with a despairing gesture. "I wrote to him; I have his answers. He will never keep his word. And now my mind is made up. I cannot bide here. It is a hopeless, useless, senseless dream. I must thole my sorrow and Robin must thole his shame, in the land across the sea."

"Bide yet, bide yet. His heart may turn."

"Never, sir, never. He is hard as

his own gate-stone, and cruel as the grave. See here, sir,"—taking a paper from her bosom—"I have a letter from my sister in Canada bidding me come to her with my boy. I shall be happier there where nane kens me. If I died here where my heart was broken, I could never rest in peace, even in the kirkyard."

"Canada's a long road," muttered Willie, thoughtfully. "Have you money to take you there?"

"No, sir; but I'll beg my way, or die upon the road, rather than rest here. Think of all that I have suffered since my boy was born! Think of what folk have said, how even my own kith and kin have cast me off! And now I have no one left, and no friend in all the world but *you!*"

"Is it me?" returned Willie, who during the above speech had been muttering wildly to himself. "A drunken ne'er-do-well, that should have been a shining light and an example! Ah, Lizzie, woman, I wish I was a decent man, for your sake. But bide a bit! Hooly and fairly! *I'll* tackle the laird myself! *I'll* speak the words o' wisdom

to him that is the father of your child!"

"He heeds neither man nor God," aid Lizzie, sadly. "I have pleaded myself for many a long year, sir, and what have I gained?"

Here Robin ran back, flushed and panting, and reported that the pool was smooth as glass, but that the trout were rising everywhere in the moonlight, as "thick as bubbles on the broth." Willie nodded, and said that he would postpone his fishing till a more convenient opportunity.

"Will you come in, sir?" said Lizzie, rising, "and take something?"

Willie shook his head.

"No, I'll be taking the road. I'm bound for Castle Hunger!"

"For the laird's? To-night!" cried the woman.

"Night or morning, what then? I'll say my say before another sun has risen."

"Oh, sir, take care! It's ill provoking an angry man!"

"It's ill provoking a man that has the gift o' tongues and maybe o' prophecy," cried Willie, with a curious laugh. "I fear but one sinner on God's

earth, and that's Willie Macgillvray! Lizzie, woman, when I whiles take a look into the depths o' my own sinful soul, I'm sickened and afraid! But the laird o' Linne! the miserful carle of Castle Hunger! I'll make him hold out his hand like a frighted school-laddie, and take the tawse, ere I have done with *him!* Though he sits like Dives at the feast (a fine feast o' pease-brose and cold water, I'm thinking!), I'll come upon him like Lazarus from the grave, and claim his kinswoman's share!"

Here the boy, who had been listening to this impassioned speech, delivered in Willie's finest preaching mood, said quietly—

"You're no' sober yet, Willie!"

"Hush, Robin!" cried his mother.

"Let him speak, let him speak!" said Willie. "Words o' wisdom often come from the mouth of a child."

Placing his hand on the boy's flaxen head, he continued—

"Hearken now to me, Robin! Whatever should come to ye, whether you dwell on land or sea, honour and love the mother that bore you as the one thing holy next to God! The sons of

Hagar loved their mother; Cain himself bowed down before his mother's grief. Holy, holy, holy is the light of a mother's love! Even Willie Macgillvray kens that! His own mother died blessing her ragged, raving, drunken, good-for-nothing son; but she lives yet, watching him out o' yon starry casement, and whiles weeping sore as she sees him yielding like a brute beast to the curse o' drink."

So saying, he patted the boy's head kindly, and turning to Lizzie, wrung her hand in farewell.

"Bide a wee!" he cried. "I'll beard the lion in his den, and maybe bring good news."

And he strode away into the night, leaving his banner of prophecy lying in the garden.

Mother and child entered the cottage, a "but" and a "ben," consisting of two rooms; one a rude kitchen, containing two press beds in the wall, the other a small sleeping chamber. A fire was burning on the hearth, and an old-fashioned oil lamp swinging from the rafters of the kitchen. A plain wooden dresser, with a few earthenware dishes,

stood in one corner. Everything was bright and clean, despite the indications of extreme poverty.

As he ate his poor supper of milk and porridge, Robin prattled garrulously of Willie's adventures in the town; while his mother, seated by the fire in an old arm-chair of black bog oak, listened sadly, with her cheek resting on her hand.

Presently the woman said—

"Do you say your prayers every night, Robin, as I taught you?"

"Ay, mither!"

"Never forget to pray for Mr. Macgillvray. He is a good man, and our best friend in all the world."

"I ken that, mither," replied the boy.

There was a pause, broken again by the woman—

"Robin!"

"Weel, mither?"

"Would you like to sail far out yonder across the sea, and to see the strange land where my sister Marion bides with her goodman? They tell me it's a bonnie place, far bonnier than Scotland, Robin."

"I would like fine to be going yonder,"

replied the boy. "I would like fine to be a sailor, and to live in a muckle ship upon the sea."

Then she told him of her plans, and drew so bright a picture of the land in the west, that he became all eagerness and delight. Standing by her side, and leaning his golden head upon her shoulder, he listened open-mouthed, his face all sunny expectation. By-and-by, looking up into his mother's face, he said—

"Does my faither bide there? Will I ever see him, mither?"

A shadow fell upon the woman's face, and her lips trembled, as she answered—

"Your father is dead to you and me, Robin. I'm thinking we shall never see his face. But if you have no father, you have *me!*"

He threw his arms round her neck, and kissed her fondly.

"You love me, Robin?"

He did not answer, but softly passed his little hand over her cheek, till it grew wet with her falling tears.

"Mither, what ails you? What makes you greet?"

"My boy, my boy!" she cried, hold-

ing him in her arms, and kissing him passionately. "If I greet, 'tis not for sorrow. The Lord has taken all the world away from me, but I have still my son!"

Ever since the boy could remember, he had lived with his mother in that cottage by the river side. Nine years before the period at which my story opens, the place had been the home of Donald Campbell, a widowed shepherd, whose only daughter Lizzie had gone into service at Castle Linne. Campbell was of Highland extraction, and, though his station in life was humble, a man of some little education, and he had at one time been a small farmer on his own account, somewhere up in the north. Coming south with his daughter, he had settled on the Linne estates, and found employment under a Lowlander who farmed a large stretch of moorland. Lizzie, an exceedingly pretty girl, had been taken in at the Castle as a sort of superior servant, and had lived there not unhappily, until one day she announced to her father her intention of taking a situation in the city of Glasgow.

After some little hesitation, Campbell suffered her to depart. She was absent for many months; then, one winter night, she reappeared at the cottage, bringing with her an infant child. What took place at the interview between father and daughter no one knew; that it was wild and stormy may be guessed; but the upshot was that Lizzie remained at home, a broken-spirited and sorrowful woman. It was bruited abroad that she had married in the south, and that her husband had deserted her; but many refused to accept a story so favourable to the poor girl's reputation. Three men only in that district knew the truth —Donald Campbell, William Macgillvray, and John Mossknow, the laird of Linne.

My tale is in need of no mystery to sharpen its interest or point its moral, and what those three men knew, may be briefly and freely told. Mossknow, a man of gloomy character and a bachelor, had been fascinated by the gentle Highland girl whom chance had brought into his house; and, after a long and secret courtship, had seduced her under promise of marriage. The only inmates of the

Castle, save herself, were an aged housekeeper and a man-servant, who acted as butler, gardener, groom, and general factotum. For it was not without reason that Castle Linne had earned its popular nickname of Castle Hunger. Mossknow spent much of his time from home; and when at home, was parsimonious to a degree. Though not a rich man in the modern sense, he owned a large extent of land, which had been in the family for many generations; but his name was a by-word in the district for mean thrift bordering on penury. The beggar avoided his gates as if the castle were plague-haunted; the poor and wretched never sought his sympathy or his charity. Yet he was a good-looking man, not without his fascinations, as poor Lizzie Campbell discovered. There was an impressive, old-fashioned grandeur about his *ménage*, though it was maintained at little expense. Rare old family silver adorned a board which was no better provided than that of some poor farmer. The shabbily grand family livery adorned the person of the old retainer who haggled over the price of a sheep's head, and went to market with a few silver

pieces, like any poor peasant. Mossknow himself, riding through his domains on a poor nag, had the dark and reserved air of a prince and master of men. He had few friends and no familiars. People said that though he pinched himself at home, he spent large sums at the gaming-tables in London; but that was mere hearsay. With all his faults and with all his eccentricities, he was looked upon with a certain respect, for was he not the hereditary lord of Castle Linne?

Be that as it may, he succeeded in overcoming the scruples of Lizzie Campbell, who, as soon as she discovered her condition, went south at the master's expense under pretence of taking a situation. Up to the moment when her child was born, she sincerely believed that Mossknow would make her his wife. Before long, however, she discovered the truth—that her betrayer had no intention of keeping his word. Even then, however, she hoped against hope, and for her own sake and that of the child, concealed the secret of the child's parentage. Four years afterwards, her father died, and she was left alone, her only friend and confidant being the

eccentric mendicant preacher, Willie Macgillvray.

Macgillvray had been her father's friend. He had appeared in the district about the time when she first took service at the Castle, and had soon made himself notorious. Having no home of his own, he had wandered from farmhouse to farmhouse, from cottage to cottage, and sometimes for days together he was the guest of Donald Campbell. Then, as mysteriously as he came, he disappeared; but rumours reached the place of his eccentric performances in distant parts of Scotland. After that, he returned from time to time, wild and ragged as ever. Roaming one day in Edinburgh, he saw Mossknow and Lizzie Campbell in company, and speedily discovered their secret; and no sooner had the girl returned to her father's cottage, than he was there too, full of sorrow and indignation. When the old man died, he followed him to the grave; and there, under the open sky, beneath the pouring rain, discoursed with strange eloquence in the very teeth of the officiating minister. From that time forth he was a constant visitor at the cottage.

Thus it happened that he became the first friend and chief companion of Lizzie's son. He taught him not only how to write and read, but how to fly a kite and tie a fly, and how to swim in the sea. Lying out in the deep heather on the hillside, he read to the boy out of strange, forbidden books—the poems of Shelley and Byron, Owen's "New Moral World," and Finch's reconstructed Bible. His speech was a strange compound of heresy and religious enthusiasm. The child listened to him in delighted wonder, for his talk had all the charm of a fairy tale.

All this time the bad habit of drinking clung to him. Every now and then he had an outbreak; more than once he became acquainted with the interior of the town gaol, whither he was committed for disorderly conduct. But with all this, he was a highly popular and influential character, as we have seen.

CHAPTER IV.

WILLIE GOES TO CASTLE HUNGER.

JOHN MOSSKNOW, the laird of Linne, sat in the library of the Castle—a large wainscoted chamber, the walls of which were adorned with a few old books and numerous empty shelves. A couple of fowling-pieces hung over the quaintly carved oak chimney-piece, and above them were the stuffed head and branching antlers of a red deer. The floor of the room was of polished oak, and in the recess of the one window, which commanded a dreary prospect seaward, was an oaken seat.

A huge book upon his knee, Mossknow sat in an arm-chair by the fire, reading. He was a dark, but tolerably well-favoured man in the prime of life, with bright piercing eyes, thin lips, and a high, narrow forehead: but for the frown which habitually darkened his face, he might have been called handsome.

It was close upon midnight, and all but the master of the house had retired

to rest. Suddenly the laird started, hearing a footstep outside the window; the next moment, a mastiff in the rear of the house barked loudly, and some one tapped softly on the window pane.

Mossknow started up and crossed to the window.

"Open, open!" cried a voice.

"Who's there?" said the laird.

"Open, and see!"

With an angry exclamation, the laird threw open the lattice of the window, which reached nearly to the ground; when, almost before he could utter a cry, a wild figure crept through the opening, and leapt into the room.

Mossknow knew him in a moment. It was Willie the Preacher.

"What brings you here?" cried the laird, startled in spite of himself by the sudden apparition. "How dare you enter this house, at such an hour?"

"Bide a wee," returned Willie, calmly, "till I get my breath."

"Out of that window as you came! Out of this house, ye drunken vagabond!"

"I'll go when my business is done,"

said the mendicant. "I have a message to deliver, drunken or sober. Listen to me, John Mossknow; or refuse to listen, and I'll cry ye up and down the length and breadth of the land as a man forsworn, a man of sin, and a liar, as ye are! From house to house I'll run, like one that carries the fiery cross, till all the world knows you, till honest men turn their backs on you, till you have to bury your head from sight of the sunshine, and maybe, in your shame, to flee the land!"

Livid with rage, not unmixed with fear, the laird listened to this extraordinary exhortation, delivered in a loud voice, in a tone of impassioned oratory.

"Silence, you limmer!" he cried, as Willie paused. "Would ye wake the house?"

"I'll wake the depths o' Hell, if need be, in such a cause," answered Macgillvray, sinking his voice a little, nevertheless. "I come here from Lizzie Campbell, who is your wife in the sight of God, and from your own begotten son, who in sight of God should be your heir."

"*She* sent you! D—— her!"

"Forbear your curses, John Mossknow, lest they come back, like ravens, to rest on your own roof. Yes, I come from the mother of your child, Robin Campbell as he is called, Robin Mossknow, lord of Linne, as he yet shall be."

"What does the woman want?" cried the laird.

"Justice," answered Willie. "She wants to know if you mean to break your word. She has kept your secret. Will you keep your promise?"

"I promised nothing."

"That's a lie, John Mossknow! You promised to make her your wife. Eh, man," he continued more gently, "have you no heart? Can you see that bonnie flower withering by the wayside? Can you see your bairn, flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone, cast away and neglected like the child of shame?"

"I have done all I can," returned the laird, fiercely. "She chose her own road, instead of doing my will, and must take the consequences."

"Man, man, do ye no' think shame," cried Willie, "to stand there in the sight of God, naked in sin and not

afraid? Blood is thicker than water, John Mossknow, mind that! I have seen your wife and son, and unless you speak the word, they will sail away from you for ever, leaving their curse to haunt you and bring the wrath of the Lord on the wicked house of Linne."

"What do they want from me? Once and for all, understand that I deny having made any promise. You say she is leaving this place—so much the better. She is a wise woman."

"She is a fool," answered Willie, sententiously. "Were I in her shoon, I would stay here and cry out on you before all the world, till you set wrong right and took home your son. But mind this, Mossknow! If she is dumb, *I* have a tongue! It will be an ill day when I begin to speak!"

The laird glared into the speaker's pale, determined face, and then, with an imprecation, strode up and down the room. In spite of himself, he was somewhat daunted; for he knew well what a power the man was in the district, how often his prophecies and denunciations had stirred up local storms, and made the place too hot for evil-doers.

Suddenly he paused, and faced his tormentor.

"You want money, I suppose? That is why she has sent you."

"She wants what is her own," returned the mendicant. "She talks of going to Canada, and has no siller to take her there."

"How much does she want?"

"Just a trifle," said Willie; "about as much as John Mossknow has wasted at the gaming-table in a night. Say, one hundred pounds!"

"A hundred pounds!" echoed the laird. "The man is mad!"

"The man's wice enough, as you ken."

"Out with you! I'll talk with you no more."

"I'll stay till my business is done," was the quiet reply; and, suiting the action to the words, Willie quietly seated himself in the arm-chair where the laird had been seated before he entered. Then, while Mossknow shook with rage, he took up the large volume which the other had been reading, and, opening it, said, as if talking to himself—

"'Famous Scottish Criminal Trials and

Capital Offences, selected and arranged by a Writer to the Signet, Anno Domini 1797.' Fine reading for a lonely night, John Mossknow, and a braw motto—*Justitia ruat cœlum et terram.* I'm glad ye ken the law; but what the law spares God still punishes, and the seducer will stand yet before the Judgment-seat!"

"Hold your tongue," cried the laird, standing over him with clenched hands, "or I'll strangle you!"

In a moment, Willie was on his feet, and before the laird could make a movement or utter a cry, he had seized him in a grip of iron, and pinned him against the wall. Mossknow, although a powerful man, was no match for the mendicant. He tried to shriek for help, but the sinewy fingers gripped his throat, and choked the shriek in its birth.

"Man, man, I could thraw your neck like a young cock's!" said Willie. "See what strength God gives those that serve Him over those that bring Him dishonour. But there, waste no more time! Give me the siller, that I may take it this night to her ye have wronged!"

So saying, he released the laird, shaking him off like a powerful hound

who magnanimously but contemptuously releases a helpless rat. Panting and trembling, Mossknow stood against the wall, and for some moments tried in vain to speak. At last, his voice found utterance.

"Will the woman promise, if I send her the money she asks, to leave Scotland at once?"

"She asks no money," said Macgillvray. "'Tis I, Willie Macgillvray, that demand it in her name."

"If I consent, will you promise that she shall not remain to molest me?"

"I'll promise nothing; but have no fear—the poor lass is but too eager to be gone."

Mossknow seated himself, drew towards him a portfolio which lay upon the table, opened it, and drew forth a cheque-book.

"I will send her fifty pounds," he said.

"You'll send her a hundred!" said Willie. "Come, man, be generous for once. 'Tis for your own flesh and blood."

"I tell you I cannot spare so much. Do you think I am made of money?"

"I think you are made of granite, like the nether millstone, and that every

golden guinea ye give is like blood gotten out of a flint. But you'll give what I ask, for all that!"

The laird hesitated, pen in hand.

"To whom can I make the cheque payable? If I write her name here, it will be flaunted before all the world."

"Make it payable to me, the Rev. William Macgillvray, B.D., of Edinburgh University!"

"You take me for a fool!" cried Mossknow, angrily.

"No, no, laird; I take ye for the fool's cousin german—a knave! Write, write, and sign!"

"How shall I know that you will not steal the money, and spend it in drink?"

"Because, knave tho' you be, you ken an honest man when ye see one! All the world kens Willie Macgillvray, who, though poor in the world's goods, is a preacher and a prophet, and never robbed man or woman of a bawbee."

"Well, there!" cried Mossknow, filling up the cheque. "Take that to the bank in the morning, and let Jessie Campbell have the money."

Willie took the cheque in his hand, and read aloud—

"Pay to William Macgillvray, or order, the sum of one hundred pounds. Signed, John Mossknow."

"And now begone! But, mind, if I find you have misappropriated à penny of that money, you shall rot in gaol for a thief!"

Willie smiled curiously.

"I'll risk it, laird. Understand that I accept this small sum only on account. It belongs to your wife and to your son. If your wife lists to go to Canada, 'tis maybe only for a time."

"Away with you!"

Willie moved towards the window, but paused there looking out.

"Eh, but it's a bonnie night," he said. "The heavens yonder are thick with stars and constellations, and the moon's walking the aisles o' blue like a shining angel of God. Be warned in time, Mossknow, and shake off your guilt. Down upon your knees, man, and pray!"

With this parting invocation, he leapt from the window and was gone. The laird went to the window, and stood there looking forth after him. Then his eyes also looked upward to the glitter-

ing signs of the sky, and a feeling of awe and shame sunk deep into his hard heart. For, with all his evil qualities, he was a superstitious man. The mendicant's strange moral exhortation had daunted and discouraged him more than he would have cared to admit, and for the first time in his life he felt the loneliness of his position.

CHAPTER V.

"QUOTH HE, 'THERE WAS A SHIP.'"

EARLY the next day, Willie Macgillvray stood at the door of Lizzie Campbell's cottage, and, after knocking gently, entered in. He found the woman busy putting together the few poor things that she possessed, and preparing for her long journey. Robin was there, bright and happy (as only children can be) at the prospect of the change.

"There, Lizzie, woman," said the mendicant, "I bring you part of your boy's birthright." And he placed in her hands a leathern bag containing a hundred pieces of gold.

"Has *he* sent [illegible]zie, amazed. "Oh, Mr. Macgillvray, I cannot take it! 'Tis far more than I shall ever need!"

"Wheesht, and count it! I drew it from the bank this morning. They looked me up and down, as if I had stolen the cheque or forged the laird's name. Count it, Lizzie, woman!"

As he continued to insist, she sat down, and counted the sovereigns in her lap. Robin looked on in delight and wonder. When the counting was over, Lizzie looked up into Willie's face and cried—

"Oh, Mr. Macgillvray, 'tis far more than I shall ever need. It is yours as much as mine. Let me share it with my only friend."

"Put it up, Lizzie, and take care of it for the bairn," returned Willie, gently. "Am I a thief, or a loon, that I should rob him of a single bawbee of his birthright?"

"But you are so poor, and——"

"It is good that the servant of God should be poor. The Lord feeds the young ravens and the doves o' the rock, and He will feed Willie Macgillvray."

Then they sat down together, and

talked of the future. The woman's mind was quite made up; she would sail to Canada, and join her sister. Some day, perhaps, she might return; she could not tell; all she craved for now was to be far away among strangers, in a strange land. Presently, having sent Robin on some pretext of a message to one of the neighbours, she heard the whole story of that stormy interview at the Castle; and at first, in her indignation, she was for sending every penny of the money back to the man who had betrayed her. But Willie persuaded her that she was only taking what belonged of right to her child.

"Lizzie, woman," he said at last, "the mills of God grind small, and everything comes to them that ken how to wait. Though you be far away, I shall be here, with my een upon the laird, and, day by day, whene'er a chance comes, I'll be pleading the cause o' the first-born. The Lord that makes the tiger's heart and the cruel heart of man kens how to subdue it. Trust in Him, Lizzie, and ne'er despair!"

That very night, after darkness had fallen, Lizzie Campbell and her son,

accompanied by [illegible]llvray, walked on foot i[illegible] Linne, and took passage in a small coasting schooner, which was about to sail from that port to Greenock. A small wooden chest, containing all poor Lizzie's worldly goods, was carried into the town and aboard the vessel by a neighbour's son, a stalwart young shepherd. About midnight, when the wind was blowing freshly from the west, the vessel lifted her anchor and set sail.

Three nights afterwards, mother and son found themselves on board one of the great ocean steamers which sail from the Clyde to Montreal. They had taken a passage in the intermediate cabin. The steamer was to depart from Greenock at daybreak, and all night long Lizzie and Willie stood on the decks, talking of the past and future. Then, as the sun rose crimson out of the east, bells rang to announce the hour of parting, crowds swarmed the decks and thronged the quays, men shouted, and, in the midst of all, the engines throbbed like a monster's heart. Tears streaming down her cheeks, Lizzie bade farewell to Macgillvray, who gave

her a fatherly kiss upon the forehead, and then, lifting Robin in his arms, kissed and blessed him tenderly. Robin looked pale and sorry, but his eye was firm as that of a young hawk, and his heart was full of boyish expectation. Then, almost before he knew, Willie was hustled ashore, where, as the great steamer began to move away, he stood amid the throng on the very edge of the quay, stretching out his arms in blessing, and crying—

"May He who guides leviathan through the waters pilot this ship across the ocean! May He who watches the husbandless and the fatherless spare the ship and all the living souls therein. Amen! amen!"

Wild and rugged, he fell upon his knees, praying and kissing hands to Lizzie and her son till they disappeared from sight. Then, waving his arms, he plunged into the crowd, and amid the laughter and jeers of the people, who saw in him only a half-witted gaberlunzie man, disappeared among the slums of the smoky seaside town.

It was one dark, rainy afternoon, just

three weeks after [illegible] rting, that John Mossk[illegible] booted and spurred on the threshold of Castle Linne, saw a wild figure rushing up the avenue towards him, and recognized with a start the face of Willie the Preacher. Pale as death, more ragged and wild than ever, Willie ran up and met the master of the Castle face to face.

"Down on your knees!" he cried. "Down on your knees, John Mossknow, and ask pardon of the God you have offended! The blood of the innocent is on your head, the cry of the mother and the orphan is rising up against you, and the curse of Cain shall rest upon you and yours, till the Lord comes in judgment, and the sea gives up its dead!"

"The man is mad!" said Mossknow, amazed and terrified. "What do you mean?"

Then he perceived with astonishment that tears were streaming down the mendicant's furrowed cheeks. Sobbing and wailing, Willie drew from his half-naked breast a newspaper, and placed it in the laird's hands, crying—

"The weariful woman, whom I loved as my own daughter! The bonnie,

golden-hair'd laddie, who was dearer to me than my own son! Read, ye murderer, read! God plucks the beauteous flower and spares the baneful weed! The house of Linne is desolate for ever, and the curse of blood hangs for ever on this wicked doer!"

Trembling from head to foot, Mossknow stood in the doorway, glancing at the paper. Behind him, in the lobby, stood the two servants of the house, startled by the sound of the mendicant's voice, and aghast at the strange scene. In a moment Mossknow learned the cause of Willie's agitation; for his eyes fell on an account of a great shipwreck —of the loss of the Clyde steamer *Glenalorn*, in a collision with an iceberg off the coast of Newfoundland. Only some dozen souls, including the chief officer and three of the crew, had escaped in the long boat, and been picked up by a German steamer. The names of the saved were given, but there was no mention of the names of Lizzie Campbell and her son.

"My God! is it possible?" exclaimed Mossknow; then, turning to the servants, he shrieked savagely, "Why do

you stand gaping [redacted] here? In with you; in with you!"

They disappeared in terror, and he was left alone with the mendicant.

"This is ill news," he said. "God knows, I am not to blame!"

"Not to blame! It is the judgment of God upon you for your cruelty in driving them forth! Their curse shall haunt you till your dying day, and drag you down!"

"Peace, man, peace!" cried the laird. "As God shall judge me, I would give all I have to have averted this calamity. Come into the house, and let us talk it over."

He led the way into his library. Willie followed him, moaning bitterly.

"Maybe, after all, the lass and her child are saved," said the laird, pacing up and down the chamber. "This is but a hasty telegraphic account. Better news may follow!"

"Never, never!" moaned the mendicant. "I foresaw it. I saw death on her face as we parted on the quay. Oh, God, why are the innocent taken, and the guilty spared?"

Over what further took place between

the two men it is unnecessary to dwell. To do Mossknow justice, he seemed deeply concerned at the unexpected calamity, and grieved that he had not dealt more gently with Lizzie Campbell and her child.

From that time forth a curious friendship, if friendship it could be called, grew up between Willie the Preacher and John Mossknow, the laird of Linne. They had a common secret, and to a certain extent a common sorrow. Mossknow was a lonely man, superstitious, eccentric, gloomy, and taciturn; he was fascinated by the character of his new acquaintance, the only creature in the world who had ever uttered the truth to his face, and bearded him in his own den.

Years passed on. No tidings from across the water came to contradict the cruel report of that fatal shipwreck. Willie Macgillvray went and came in the old wild way; a little older and a little sadder, that was all. Mossknow did not marry, but as time advanced his eccentricities increased. He seldom left home, but lived an ascetic life at the Castle. From time to time he was visited by Willie the Preacher. Every

year deepened the intimacy between the two men, but not a single soul in the neighbourhood guessed the nature of the tie which bound them together.

BOOK THE SECOND.

TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

CHAPTER VI.

EDWARD LINNE.

It was New Year's Eve, twenty years after. Instead of snow, heavy rain was falling, and the wind whistled as drearily as a voice singing wild requiems for the dead.

"An eerie night," muttered old Sampson Gardner, the landlord of the Rob Roy Inn, on the outskirts of the town of Linne, as he sat beside his kitchen fire, smoking his pipe and listening to the pattering of the rain and the weary whistling of the wind. "Wearifu' weather brings wearifu' times, and ilka year that slips past doesna mend matters. Lord save us! the time has been when I hae seen the snow half a yard deep on the Linne road, and heard

these old walls r[illegible] clink o' glasses and the la[illegible] o' merry-making folk; but noo scarce a traveller comes to the Rob Roy, and the old walls are full of chinks for the wind to creep ben; and, instead of snow, we get the awsome greeting o' the rain."

As he spoke, he rubbed his knees, and gazed with dimly blinking eyes into the fire.

The wind whistled down the chimney, and blew the blaze upon the hearth. A stream of rain was creeping in beneath the door, and soiling the silvery whiteness of the fine sea-sand which was strewn upon the fresh-scrubbed boards.

"Mysie, woman!" called Sampson, slowly turning round and gazing at the shining plates upon which the firelight played, as if in mockery at the dreary sounds from without, "Mysie, woman, come doon! We shall hae nae travellers here the night; we'll sup together, you and I. We ll try to imagine we're young, Mysie, woman, and we'll share a tumbler o' toddy to mind us that 'tis New Year's time."

As he spoke, he started, listened, and smiled.

The sound of wheels now rose above the whistling of the wind; then came three loud raps at the door.

Old Sampson put down his pipe upon the hob, shuffled across the floor, and drew back the bolts and bars. As the door flew open, admitting a blast of wind and a few heavy drops of half-frozen rain, a traveller entered.

"A wat night, sir!" cried old Sampson; and he gazed out in the blackness, as if expecting other figures to issue forth.

But none came. The wheels crunched the gravel again as they moved away, and as they did so Sampson was recalled to himself by the harsh, imperious voice of his guest.

"Close the door! Don't you see how the rain is driving in? And come and get me something warm, for I must soon be on the move again."

As soon as the old innkeeper had obeyed the orders of his guest and securely fastened up the creaking door, he turned and gave a secret glance at the new arrival.

He was a young man, tall and thin, with black hair clustering about his head, and a pair of keen black eyes.

Although the features were well-formed, it was by no means a pleasant face, especially when, as now, its expression was marred by a heavy frown and a restless wandering of the strange, dark eyes.

He was wrapped in a Scotch plaid, the heavy folds of which had afforded him good protection from the rain; but the water dripped from the brim of his deer-stalker's hat, and made a little pool upon the floor.

"Did you say, sir, that you wished to gang forth again the night?" asked Sampson.

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"No, my man," he returned, with grim pleasantry; "I did *not* say so. Who the devil would *wish* to go out on a night like this? For my part, I love comfort far too well; but when *duty*," he added, making a wry face, "calls me, why, I go."

He glanced around as he spoke, and for the first time noticed that a third person stood looking at him and listening to his words.

A little old woman in a mob cap and cotton gown—no other, indeed, than Mysie Gardner, who, in obedience to

her husband's call, had descended the stairs, and now stood amazed at the sight of a stranger.

The young man looked at her calmly from head to foot; then turned away, and proceeded to divest himself of his wet wrappers. This done, he took a chair before the fire, and put his feet on the hob.

"Come, don't stand looking at me like two fools," he said, "but give me a glass of toddy! At the half-hour I shall be on the road again," he added, gazing at the hands of the old Dutch clock which stood in a corner of the kitchen. "That will give the horse seventeen minutes to rest and feed; and if the brute hasn't had enough by that time, why, it must starve, that's all!"

"Hae you far to gang, sir?" asked old Sampson, who resumed his pipe and seat while Mysie busied herself over the fire, preparing hot water for the stranger.

"I'm bound for Linne Castle. Well, is that far away?"

"Only six miles, sir; but a gruesome road on siccan a night. I'm thinking you would be wise to bide here."

"And I think I should be a fool."

Neither spoke again.

The young man sat with his feet upon the hob, and quietly sipped his toddy, gazing moodily at the hands of the clock as they slowly travelled on.

Sampson smoked his pipe, and glanced alternately at the fire and at the dark face of the stranger, while Mysie quickly spread the cloth upon the table, and prepared the evening meal.

Presently a slight click of the clock announced the half-hour. The stranger rose, drained off the last of his toddy, paid the score, wrapped his plaid around him, pulled on his hat, and had the door thrown open just as the noise of the wheels of the trap was heard again at the front door.

Old Sampson bade the stranger good night and a God-speed on his journey, Mysie curtsied and smiled, but the young man took no heed. Without a look or a word, he crossed the threshold into the darkness, and the sound of wheels told them that he was being borne away.

"Lord preserve us a'!" muttered the innkeeper. "He's like an ugly wraith ganging to the hoose o' death," said

Sampson. "I would rather the Rob Roy be withoot strangers than receive siccan limmers as yon."

Meanwhile the dog-cart containing the stranger travelled very slowly along the road.

It was black dark all round. Every hour the wind was increasing in violence, and the chilly rain fell with ceaseless patter upon the ground. The young man sat moodily silent by the driver's side, never even moving save when a blast of wind struck him with greater violence than usual, or the raindrops beat into his blinded eyes.

"A God-forgotten place," he said at last, as the dog-cart stopped, and the driver whistled shrilly to call forth the lodge-keeper to open the gate. "Is this the entrance to the Castle?"

"Ay, nae doot," said the driver.

"Then the old fool at the inn lied. He told me it was six miles to it, and we can't have come six."

"We hae come four, sir; there is twa more to travel."

"What, is the drive through the grounds two miles long?"

"Ay, is it!"

The young man leaned back and laughed to himself as the carriage rolled through the gates and along a road which seemed to wind into a dense black mass of woodland. Here the wind whistled more drearily than ever, here the rain fell in a shower from the swaying branches of the fir-trees. And the young man raised his face to receive the drops, and laughed. Then he got a fit of impatience and urged the driver on.

But the road was bad, and the progress was slow. At every turn they seemed to plunge deeper into the mire, until the stranger began to think that they had lost their way. At length, however, a faint gleam of light reassured him. In two minutes more the dog-cart stopped before the door of the lonely house.

The driver, quickly alighting, rang the bell, while the young man slowly unrolled himself from his rugs, and, ascending the flight of stone steps, reached the top as the door was slowly opened.

It was opened by a shabby old man in plain dress, who bowed at the sight of the traveller, and, standing aside,

gravely invited him to enter. Doing so, the young man found himself in a hall, large and lofty, with a black and white stone-paved floor and heavy oaken rafters. A faint blue light was cast from a lamp which hung suspended from the rafters.

"How is my uncle?" he asked quickly.

"The laird is nae better," returned the man, gloomily, as, bowing again, he led the way across the hall, and, opening the door, motioned him to enter. "If you will be pleased to tak' a chair, I will inform the laird that you are here," he said; then he noiselessly closed the door and retired.

Instead of taking a chair, the young man turned on his heel, and looked searchingly around the room.

It was shabbily, even meanly, furnished, dimly lighted, and sombre-looking. Old moth-eaten hangings drooped about the doors and windows, while from the walls gazed down the forbidding faces of the lairds of Linne for many generations past. Oppressed by the intense gloom of the place, the young man shivered, and was about to draw near the faint spark of fire which

flickered in the grate, when the room door opened, and the servant again appeared.

"The laird's compliments, and will you be pleased to tak' your dinner? He'll maybe gie himself the pleesure of seeing you later on."

The young man started, but said nothing; then he made a movement of assent, and followed his guide up to a sleeping-room overhead.

"Dinner will be served in ten minutes, sir," said the man, as he closed the door.

"Whew! a warm reception to give to an affectionate nephew," said our traveller, when he found himself alone. "I begin to think the old fool is daft indeed! But, after all, there's method in his madness. A good dinner is by no means to be despised after such a journey."

He proceeded to make his toilet carefully. When he had finished, he began to feel quite cheerful, and as he descended the stairs he whistled a lively air.

The grave servant stood in the hall to receive him again. As he approached, the dining-room door was thrown wide

open. Assuming all the airs of a grand seigneur, he was about to enter the room, when suddenly his eye fell upon an object which made him pause right in the shadow of the door.

CHAPTER VII.

MARJORIE.

THE cause of this sudden and embarrassed pause was a young girl, who, clad in a dress of plain homespun cloth, stood upon the dining-room hearth, gazing abstractedly towards the door. As the young man appeared, she bowed slightly, but he, without returning her salutation, continued to stand and stare stupidly at her.

She was quite a girl, not more than eighteen years of age, with eyes of azure blue and a skin like alabaster. Her figure was slight, but full of lissome curves, which were revealed by the clinging folds of her tightly-fitting dress. But for her delicate hands and strangely white complexion, she might have been taken for some peasant maiden. Her

hair was bound up in a simple snood, her robe was simply cut, and reached only to the ankles, and a white kerchief was laid lightly round her neck and over her bosom.

When the young man had made his appearance she had stood calm and self-possessed; but as that curious gaze remained riveted upon her from the doorway, the hot blood suffused her face and neck, and she quickly turned away.

"I beg your pardon," said the young man, stepping forward; then, as she merely bowed again, he added, quickly, "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Edward Linne."

If by this information he expected to ascertain the girl's identity in return, he was disappointed. The mention of his name merely served to dispel her momentary confusion, and, with a cold inclination of the head, she moved away, took her seat at the head of the table, and motioned him to be seated too.

Edward Linne was not the sort of young man to be easily put out. Although only five and twenty years of age, he knew as much of life as most men of fifty, but this sort of conduct

rather puzzled him and made him feel anything but at his ease. Had he been left alone with the girl, he confidently believed that he would have soon succeeded in breaking through the ice. As it was, he felt that his conduct was being quietly but keenly watched by the solemn-faced servant who stood behind the girl's chair, and he was uneasy under the scrutiny.

He was staggered, too, by the girl's wonderful self-possession. Who could she be, so calmly and so coldly to do the honours of the house? She was dressed little better than a peasant, yet her manners were those of a somewhat reserved young lady. A thrill of terror ran through him. Could his uncle, the laird, have married, after all, and have a family, and perhaps, besides a daughter, a son and heir?

It was years since he had met his uncle, and they had never been on very good terms. Some days before, he had been summoned from Paris, where he was then amusing himself, to come at once to the Castle, to which in all his life before he had never received an invitation. His uncle's eccentric habits

and extraordinary love of solitude had long kept all his relatives at a distance.

Scarcely a word was spoken during dinner. All the young man's attempts at small talk proved unavailing. The girl was cold as an icicle, and declined conversation. Fortunately, the meal, which consisted of the very simplest fare, was soon over.

Altogether, he was not at all sorry when at length the ordeal came to an end, and the girl rose quietly from her seat, and with an icy bow left him.

"Who the devil *is* she?" he soliloquized, when he found himself alone. "She isn't a wife, for she doesn't wear a ring, and my venerable uncle can't, surely, have a daughter?"

He rang the bell, asked the servant if his uncle would see him that night, and received an answer in the negative. The laird had already retired to rest.

"By the way," he said, "you only served water at dinner, and I am somewhat thirsty. Can I have something to drink?"

"Ye can hae some soor milk," returned the old man, grimly.

"Sour milk! Nice lively liquor in this climate. Have you no wine?"

"The laird," returned the servant, with a snort, "allows nae wine or fermented liquor intil the hoose. He's been teetotal these ten years."

"Humph! Perhaps you can inform me who the young lady is who sat down with me at dinner?"

"She's just Miss Marjorie," was the reply.

"But who is she? what is she doing here?"

"That's nane o' my business," returned the old man. "If you're curious, ask the laird!"

And, with another grim bow, the old man left the room.

"Pleasant quarters!" muttered Linne. "They may well call it Castle Hunger. Mutton broth, boiled mutton and carrots, for the gentel board, and not a drop of wine. The old miser! Well, I suppose I must content myself with a cigar."

He suited the action to the word, and began to smoke. He had not been so occupied many minutes, when the door opened, and the servant stalked in.

"The laird's compliments, and will you put oot that tobacco? The smell o' the filthy reek is filling the hoose, and the laird can scent it in his bedroom!"

With difficulty suppressing an oath, Edward Linne threw his cigar into the fire.

"Here, show me my room," he cried; "I'll go to bed."

The old man nodded, and, taking a candle from the table, led the way slowly and calmly to a dismal chamber at the top of the house.

"Mind and blaw oot the light," were his parting injunctions.

"Stop, give me some lucifers!"

"We hae nane. The laird forbids lucifer matches intil the hoose. Dae ye want to burn us a' in our beds?"

By noon the next day Edward Linne found himself closeted with his uncle.

The laird of Linne was now a man of about sixty years, with ill health written in every line of his stern countenance. He lay back on an old tapestry couch in his bedroom, and fixed his eyes upon his nephew's face, as if to read his very soul.

"You've o'er much of your father's blood in you ever to do much good in the world," he said. "A young lad who gambles and bets and has disgraceful amours (ah, ye see I know!) at five-and-twenty, is not likely ever to be a credit to his family."

The young man coloured, bit his lip, tapped the floor impatiently with his foot, and said nothing.

"I am glad to see you lack the face to deny these things," said the old man, peevishly. "I ken your past life won't bear looking into. What I want is to make you promise better for the future."

"Of course, uncle, I will promise," said the young man, eagerly; "I have been wild, I know; most young men are; but I have come to years of discretion now."

"So had your father when he married your mother; and yet—and yet—— Edward Linne," continued the laird, eagerly, "do *you* ever intend to marry?"

The young man laughed uneasily.

"I suppose I shall succumb to my fate some day."

"Say ye so?" said his uncle, grimly.

"You mean—when you wear my shoon?"

For a time, the old man lay looking at the fire, then he turned again to his nephew.

"Edward Linne," he said, "it was never with my consent that they filled your head with all this folly, and made you live a useless life because of my wealth, mind that! When my brother married your mother, he was dead to me. When I heard of your wild extravagances and numberless follies, and was told that they regarded you as my heir, I laughed in my sleeve, and used to think how bravely I would deceive them. But when your father died, and broke the shameful chain which bound him to his kith and kin, my heart was kinder towards his son!"

He paused a moment, and continued—

"I excused your follies for the sake of what your father once was to me. I was willing to regard you as my relation by blood. Your subsequent conduct was told to me, and once or twice I was on the point of striking your name for ever from my will, but in the end I refrained. Weel, I am willing to forget and forgive

again, if only you will put your hand in mine and promise never again to do aught which could bring disgrace upon our old name. I know you have no affection for me or mine. I know it's only the hope of my death which brings you here now; but, if I gain your promise of amendment, if I thought that the old place would be safe with you, why, I can, maybe, die in peace."

"Uncle," said the young man, gently, "is it so hard to trust me? Can you not believe that when I tell you I repent, I speak the truth?"

"Weel, weel, I will try to believe it; yet your past life promises but ill, I'm thinking. There, go now," he said, waving his thin hands impatiently; "I want Marjorie."

As he spoke, he touched a small hand-bell which stood beside him, and almost immediately, in answer to the summons, there appeared in the dark doorway the fair, cold face of the young girl who had graced the dinner-table with her presence the night before.

She bowed to the young man as coldly as she had done on the preceding night,

but when she reached the couch whereon the laird of Linne was lying, and took her seat on the small footstool by his side, her blue eyes lit up with such a light of affection as made the young man wonder still more. Then, as the old man again signalled for him to depart, he quietly moved from the room, and left the two together.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAIRD'S CONFESSION.

No sooner were they left alone than the manner of the old man changed, and, taking the young girl's hand in his, he looked into her face with a curious smile.

"It's an ill task, Marjorie," he said, "waiting for dead men's shoon. How like you yon slip of my brother's blood?" Then, without waiting for her to reply, he continued, "He has a shifty eye and a treacherous heart, I'm thinking; eh, Marjorie? Did you see how he glowered when you came creeping in? He's wondering, I'll swear, whether

you are kith and kin. Have you told him nothing?"

"Nothing," answered Marjorie. "We have hardly spoken to each other."

"Sandie says he asked for strong drink last night, and he nearly choked me with the fumes of his tobacco, the graceless loon! Yet, for all that, Marjorie, blood is thicker than water, and he's the heir of Linne."

"Yes, sir," said Marjorie, uncomfortable under the old man's eyes, still fixed with a curious expression upon her.

"Come, tell me, graceless as he seems, how would you like him for a husband?"

"For a husband!" cried Marjorie, starting.

"Ay, and why not? You are a lonely lass, and he will be the laird when I am gone."

"But you will not go! You are better and stronger already."

"The hand of Death is on me; the blood runs cold as quicksilver at seventy years. I'll soon be lying in my grave."

"No, no!"

"But ay, Marjorie! But if I was not ripe, do you think I would be

gathered? Now, listen, Marjorie. I have been a sinful man. Thirty years ago, I was graceless as yon young limmer, but I have repented; and if there is hope for me, there may be hope for him as weel. Let that stand. You ken, Marjorie, I never married?"

"I know that, sir."

"But do you know all? You know nothing! 'Tis a secret that rests till this day between Willie Macgillvray and me. Years before you came to this house, flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone was cast, by God's will, to the bottom of the sea!"

The girl looked at him in wonder. His face was set like granite, but his eyes were dilated and shone like fire.

"There was a lass as bonnie as May morning. She was a poor peasant; I was a rich man; and I beguiled her under promise of marriage. She bore one bairn, a son, Marjorie! The golden-hair'd laddie! I think I see him now! Had I done my duty to man and God, he would be kneeling here this day, and all I have, all I have saved and kept (for I have aye been a saving man), would be his own."

He paused in great agitation, threw himself back upon his pillow, and gasped for breath.

"Do not speak of all this," said Marjorie. "You will make yourself ill again."

"I *must* speak! The secret's gnawing me, Marjorie! 'Twas a judgment upon me! Willie Macgillvray said so, and he was right. I should have taken the woman to my heart, and the bairn upon my knee; but I was o'er proud, proud as Herod; and now, like him, I'm eaten up as with worms. Oh, but he was a bonnie bairn, weel-faced and comely, with eyes like the blue sky, and a voice like running water. Had he lived, he would have been a man o' men!"

"But what became of him, sir?" asked Marjorie. "Did he die?"

"Drown'd, drown'd! Mother and son went down, with a curse on *me!* I betrayed my promise; I refused to do an act of justice; and, sick with despair, she went away to join her folk in Canada. I would have called her back, but it was o'er late. 'Twas the year o' the great storm, and the ship was lost, with every soul on board."

He paused again, and, stretching out a lean hand, pointed to a rude painting in oil which hung over the bed: the portrait of a man in the prime of life, with a dark, forbidding face, narrow, harsh, and stern.

"Look yonder, Marjorie! That was *me*, when the strength of manhood was upon me, at the time when the curse fell! An Edinburgh artist painted it for five pounds and his keep, and folk say it is weel done; but to me, it seems like the ghaist of the wicked past. Weel, I repented! Sickness came, and in sickness I saw my sins grow bigger and bigger. Lonesome years followed. I had no friend, no man to whom I could open up my heart, but Willie the Preacher! At last, one day, ten years syne, he came to me, leading a wee lassie by the hand. 'Your flesh and blood is drown'd under the sea,' he said; 'here's something to keep and rear instead.'"

"Yes, I remember," sighed Marjorie.

"Your own father and mother were dead, and you were alone in the world. The moment I saw ye, my heart went out to you; for you had my son's clear skin, and blue eyes, and golden hair.

But at first I was mad with Willie Macgillvray, and ready to drive you both from my door. 'Who is she?' I asked. 'The bairn of a better man than you or me,' the rogue replied; 'one Alexander Glenny, who was at college wi' me, and died a minister o' the kirk.' Then you began to sob and cry, fear'd of my frowning face; and that pleased me, and, since ye did not wish to stay, I inclined to keep you; and stayed you have till this hour."

Tears were streaming down the girl's cheeks. Her eyes were full of dreamy retrospection, all her face full of sorrow. Stooping forward, the old man patted her hand, not ungently, as he said—

"Dry your tears, Marjorie! It has been a cheerless life, I ken, here alone with me; but all is for the best. You have had schooling from the dominie, and Willie Macgillvray has taught you the Latin and moral philosophy, and you have a tongue like a lady. And a lady you shall be, when I am lying in the kirkyard!"

"Do you think I care for that?" cried Marjorie. "All I want is to remain with you, and be your nurse."

"Poor lassie! poor lassie!" muttered the laird. "You've grown round my heart like the mistletoe round the oak; and you're white and bright as the mistletoe-berry. My own daughter could not seem closer to my heart, Marjorie."

"I am your daughter, sir, am I not? Indeed, I love you like a daughter."

"Ay, ay, ay! And you shall be a lady yet; I have set my heart upon it. But oh, Marjorie, if I had seen my son! The bonnie laddie, flesh o' my flesh, bone o' my bone, that should have been my heir! Drown'd, drown'd! Will I meet him, I'm wondering, when the sea gives up its dead?"

He lay back upon his cushions, moaning and muttering to himself. Suddenly he started, and Marjorie sprang to her feet, for a voice in the room said—

"Who comes here like a wolf intil the fold? Who comes here like a thief in the night, to steal my boy's birthright?"

Standing erect and bareheaded in the middle of the chamber was Willie Macgillvray, as worn and woebegone, as ragged and wild, as ever, and covered now with the snows and frosts of many years. But though old age had set its

marks upon him, his figure was still straight and hale, his voice deep and musical, his manner full of strength and power.

"Is that you, Willie Macgillvray?" said the laird, nervously. "What brings you at this hour?"

"I came to see the limmer who would steal the birthright," was the reply. "He's down yonder, and I *have* seen him!"

"You mean my nephew Edward? Weel, he is my nearest kin."

"The hawk lies wounded on the ground, and the corby-crow would inherit? Let me show him the door, and point his ill face southward, to the land whence he came."

"I sent for him," said the laird, sharply. "He will stay here till I bid him go."

Willie was about to speak again, but at a look from Marjorie he desisted. Falling back upon his pillows, Mossknow cried, waving his hand towards the door—

"Go! leave me—both of you! It is ill to trouble a dying man. Leave me, and let me try to sleep."

Without a word, Marjorie stooped and kissed him; then, turning to the mendicant, drew him gently from the chamber.

Passing downstairs in silence, they left the house, and, as they did so, encountered Edward Linne upon the threshold, leaning against the porch and indolently surveying the dreary landscape. He met Willie's scornful look with a careless yawn; but smiled and nodded to Marjorie as she went by.

"Come down with me to the seashore," said Willie. "I sicken when I breathe the air o' Castle Hunger. Let the old man sleep a while; maybe the Lord will send a dream to warn him against yon graceless loon."

It was a dark and chilly afternoon; the sky was cloudless, and the hills stretched away inland in inky silhouette. Their way lay across dreary moorland till they came in sight of the sea, and, as they went, following no footpath, but crossing the bleak moor, the heather grew thicker and the ground swelled into purple knolls. Neither spoke; both were deep in thought. Emerging from the moor, they gained a country road skirting the edge of the sea, and

came in sight of a thinly wooded promontory facing westward. The wood was composed of bare fir-trees and a few stunted pines, and on the inland side, facing the road, hung a rain-beaten board, nailed against a tree, and bearing this tremendous inscription in rudely painted letters—

TAKE NOTICE! PRIVATE!
IN THE NAME OF WILLIE THE HERMIT!
STEEL TRAPS AND SPRING GUNS!
CAVE CANEM!
KEEP TO THE ROAD!

Marjorie smiled, as she had often smiled before, at these words of warning, and, entering the wood by Willie's side, found herself before the hermit's habitation. Built among the trees, against the side of a low crag, was a rude hut or cabin, roofed with withered branches and peat cut from the moss. The bare cliff formed one side of the hut, the others were rudely built of stones carried from the seashore. There was a broken door, and a small wooded window pane, both secured from some ruined cabin among the mountains.

The door stood open, and they entered.

On the bare earth within were a couple of stools, a rude table formed of the stump of a tree, and a couple of planks that formed a sort of bed. A peat fire was burning in the middle of the hut, and filling the place with its blue smoke. Down the inward wall, or cliff-side, ran damp green and golden moss, trickling with dews distilled by the solid rock.

It was a miserable place, but Willie entered it with a proud sense of possession.

"Sit ye down, Marjorie!" he said, while the girl paused, half choking with the thick smoke. "Peat reek is good for the lungs, my lass, and for the eyes as weel. I have found the peace o' God here, and it has ne'er come to Castle Hunger. Not a stone, not a peat stack, not a bough of wood, but I carried here with my own hands. There's water from the rock, an ever-flowing fountain, and with a bit of bread now and then, and a sup of milk, and the hens to lay me bonnie white eggs, I'm better lodged than a king."

As he spoke, two or three ragged hens were running about his feet. He put his hand into his pocket, and draw-

ing out a handful of dry corn, threw it down among them. He sat down on the boards of the bed, and lifted some dilapidated books which were lying thereon.

"The mind must feed as well as the body, and I have my library: the Bible o' God, according to the new Moral Law; the poems o' Robin Burns, published by MacEwen o' Kilmarnock; Shelley's 'Queen Mab;' Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress.' But there, you ken them all."

Marjorie looked at him in wonder; for, though she had known him so many years, he was as great a puzzle to her as ever.

"Oh, Mr. Macgillvray," she said, "how can you bear to live in such a place, and you, as the laird says, a gentleman born?"

Willie smiled and nodded.

"And a graduate o' Edinburgh University, and a minister o' the kirk! See my name on this book, Marjorie—the Rev. William Macgillvray, B.D., which stands for Bachelor o' Divinity, or Damn'd Blackguard, just as ye care to take it! Esau sold his birthright for a mess of porridge, and I, Willie Mac-

gillvray, sold mine for a mouthful of drink. Weel, weel, it's a world of ups and downs!"

"But you are growing old. You should have some one to look after you, instead of living here all alone."

"God looks after me," returned Willie. "Marjorie, woman, I see Him looking at me all night through yon hole in the roof, and His eye is blue and bonnie, like the summer sky; but whiles He weeps for my sins, and His tears shower down upon me like the falling rain."

So mad and yet so wise! thought Marjorie; for she knew that the man who talked so wildly sometimes was as shrewd as the shrewdest farmer in the district.

"Tell me about the laird," she said. "Will he get better?"

"In his grave," answered the hermit. "I see the sleep-stour in his eyes already. Conscience gnaws his vitals as the vulture gnawed the liver of Prometheus, and he calls, like yon Titan on Caucasus, to the elemental powers o' Nature—'the air, and the fountains, and the laughing sea, and earth, the mother of all!' Weel, they hear him,

and in their eternal mercy are weaving him a shroud and howking him a grave!"

"He will not die!" cried Marjorie, while the tears streamed down her face.

"Why should he live?" asked Willie, sadly.

"I am sure *you* will miss him, sir. He respects and loves you—he has been your friend."

"Maybe, maybe," muttered the hermit. "I have forgiven him long ago. And yet—I can ne'er forgive him if he brings in yon evil limmer to steal my bairn's birthright!"

Reminded by these words of her conversation with the laird, Marjorie bent forward eagerly, and said—

"Is it true that he ever married—that he had a child? He spoke of a son to-day, but I thought that he was wandering."

"He spoke the truth. He had a son, a bonnie son."

"Who was drowned long ago at sea?"

"Ay, drowned, drowned!" cried Willie, with sudden vehemence. "He died, and left his death at the door o' John Mossknow."

"If you heard him speak of his son! Oh, sir, it was pitiful! He must have loved him so much!"

"I taught him that lesson," answered Willie, grimly. "I dinged the truth into his lonely heart, till he fell on his knees like David, and cried, 'Absalom! my son, my son!' But it was o'er late. The deed was done. They will meet up yonder—the old man with his withered face and rheumy een, the boy with his blue eyes and golden hair; and the Lord will judge!"

"Are you certain that he is dead?" cried Marjorie. "Maybe——"

"No, Marjorie; had the Lord spared him, we should have heard. The mermaids have him, and the spirits of the deep waters.

> 'Nothing o' him but doth change
> Into something rich and strange!'

I never stand by yonder shore, and see the golden tangle drifting in with the tide, and the medusæ floating and sparkling in the sun, but I seem to catch a glimpse of the boy I loved. Peace be with him now and for evermore. Amen."

Troubled and distressed beyond measure, Marjorie rose and held out her hand.

"I must go now, sir. The laird will be wanting me."

"Go, then, Marjorie, and leave Willie Macgillvray to his prayers," said the hermit, placing his strong hand on the girl's head and turning her face towards the light that stole in from above. "Eh, my lass, but you are bonnie! You took the heir's place, and shed a light o' salvation into Mossknow's hard heart. Weel, it is a lass, when it should have been a lad. Had ye seen my boy, you would have loved him, Marjorie!"

"I am sure of that," cried the girl.

"So bright, so sunny, so bold and bonnie — a sunbeam, Marjorie! He spake out his mind like a man till a man, when he saw me under the curse o' drink. 'You're drunk again, Willie! says he. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings is the evil man rebuked! I've never tasted whiskey since the day I got the news of my boy's death!"

Here Macgillvray spoke the simple truth. For twenty years he had been a teetotaler; yet the old habits of his

youth and early manhood had left their indelible marks upon his brain. So wild and eccentric were his outbursts still, that people yet attributed them to strong liquors.

As Marjorie left the cave, or cabin, she glanced back and saw that the old man had fallen upon his knees and was praying aloud. Greatly moved by what she had heard and seen, she walked slowly from the wood, and crossing the road, made her way again towards the open moor.

CHAPTER IX.

BRAWNET.

She had only gone a short distance, when she saw, quietly grazing on the moorland, a shaggy mountain pony, saddled and bridled, which stood as if awaiting her return. When she came up and patted his neck, he raised his head and sniffed her fair neck and hand, then stood quietly as if he expected her to mount and ride away.

"And so, Brawnet, my pet," she said,

"you have followed me over the moor! Did old Sandie saddle and bridle you, and send you to find your mistress?"

But she did not mount. Her hand continued to pass caressingly over the animal's shaggy neck and shoulder, her eyes quietly regarded him, but her thoughts were far away. Presently she threw the bridle over her arm and walked along, the animal following her.

She was looking at the sea now, and thinking of the story which the laird had told her only that day—the story of the bright-eyed boy who should even then have been at his father's bedside, but who, alas! lay cold and dead at the bottom of the ocean. Ever since she had heard them speak of the outcast lad the thought of him had haunted her, and the words of Willie Macgillvray had only intensified her feelings of interest and pain.

"If only my dream were true," she murmured aloud. "If he would come back—oh, if he would only come back!"

"And if his presence would bring any comfort to this God-forgotten place," said a voice in her ear, "I most heartily wish he would, though I haven't the

slightest idea of whom you are talking!"

She started, looked up, and encountered the eyes of Edward Linne.

He had not stolen upon her unawares; he had simply followed her as she walked along the bridle-path, wondering as much at her beauty as at the strange preoccupation of her manner; and she had been too much lost in thought to hear the sound of his measured footsteps behind her. But when she quite unconsciously uttered her thoughts aloud, and he answered her, she started as if awakening from a dream.

"I beg your pardon," continued Linne, raising his hat politely, for something in the girl's manner compelled him to treat her as a lady. "I am afraid I have startled you, but I didn't mean to be rude."

And he thought once more, "She is certainly very pretty. Who the deuce can she really be?"

She returned his bow in the same coldly polite manner as she had done on the preceding day, when they had met at dinner, but she said nothing. They looked at each other for a moment in silence; the girl's eyes were full of a

questioning curiosity, his were full of admiration.

Had Edward Linne met Marjorie under ordinary circumstances, and had she behaved as would any ordinary girl, it is certain that her beauty, pronounced as it was, would have made but little impression upon him. He had encountered any number of light and pretty women; a comely face, therefore, had little charm for him. But this girl had piqued his pride and awakened his curiosity. Although she had met him as the heir of Linne, and must have observed, even after so short an acquaintance, that he was a more than ordinarily handsome man, she showed no disposition whatever to bow down to him as a superior; indeed, she had treated him rather as an equal, whose personality had no charm for her. At least, this was how he read it, and he was piqued accordingly.

Had he known the truth, however, it was probable he would not even then have been standing on the hillside calling up his best smiles for Marjorie. Her coldness of the night before had arisen not from hauteur but simple ner-

vousness. Since she had been an inmate of the Castle, she had met few strangers, and the duty of entertaining this one was a task she by no means loved. During the dinner, therefore, she had sat like a pallid statue, cold to the finger-tips, and the moment the meal was over she had been glad enough to escape to her room.

But now her nervousness was increased tenfold; for, as she stood looking at the young man, who by this time was smiling most sweetly upon her, she recalled the words which the laird had uttered to her only the night before—"What would you think of him for a *husband*, Marjorie?" Perhaps the very question had been put to *him?* "What would you think of her for a *wife*, Edward?" At the bare thought of all this, the girl's cheeks grew crimson, and she turned as if about to depart.

But the young man stopped her.

"Do you know," he said, gaily, "you are not treating me quite fairly. I am here as your guest, and yet you persistently avoid me. Have I offended you during the few hours I have been here?"

"Offended me, sir?" said Marjorie, quickly. "No, indeed. How could you do that?"

She had thought to please him, but she had only succeeded in wounding his self-love still more. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly," he said, "my existence is of so little importance to you, that anything I might say or do would have no power to offend you?"

If by this he expected to surprise her into paying him a compliment, he was disappointed. She did not even contradict his statement. But, seeing that he still barred her way, she said quietly—

"I think you should let me pass. I have been out o'er long already, and the laird will be wanting me."

But the young man did not move.

"Come," he said, "don't let us part before we have become friends. Although we have eaten at the same table and slept under the same roof, we have not even committed the first act of friendship. Won't you shake hands?"

She held out her hand in a moment, and he took it in both of his.

"There is nothing to prevent our remaining friends, believe me," he said, earnestly.

For the moment he most honestly desired her friendship, for was she not the only human being in that dreary neighbourhood with whom he could exchange a word?

"And now," he continued, pleasantly, "won't you permit me to walk with you for a little? There is plenty of time, I assure you. When I left the Castle, scarcely a quarter of an hour ago, the old man was sleeping peacefully, and the grim retainer, who was keeping guard over his master, said he hoped 'Miss Marjorie wouldn't come back, for she needed air and rest as much as his master needed nursing.' And, indeed," added the young man, "I think he was right. You look too pale for a lady who has spent her life on the Scotch hills."

"I am aye pale," said Marjorie, simply.

He had ceased to bar her path by this time, and they were walking side by side along the road.

"Won't you let me lead your pony

for you?" he asked, offering to take the bridle, which was still thrown lightly over her arm.

But Marjorie shook her head.

"Brawnet would not follow you," she said; then added hastily, "He wouldn't follow any stranger; but he knows me, because I have ridden him ever since I was a little lass."

"Ah! then you have lived here all your life, I suppose?"

"A good part of it, I think. I was about ten year old when I came to live at the Castle."

"You are related to the laird?"

"No, indeed. Why do you say so?"

"I don't *say* so," returned the young man. "I only *hope* so, because then you would be related to *me*."

As this assertion seemed to require no answer, she gave none. After a few minutes' silence, the young man spoke again.

"How could you endure to live here for so many years?" he said.

"Do you think you could not do the same?" she asked, smiling.

"Assuredly not. I think a few years' residence here would qualify me for a

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lunatic asylum. Have you been happy here?"

"Yes," was her reply. "Maybe I wearied and fretted at first," she added, determined to be truthful at all hazards. "The place was so lonely, and the laird was so strange that I feared him, and longed to go away. I used to spend all my days in the woods and fields about the Castle; and sometimes I would sit down and cry, thinking of my mother and father, and the happy home I had had before they died. That was how I came to know Brawnet here, my own pony. I was sitting in a field one day, crying and dreaming, when I felt what I thought was a hand passing over my hair, and when I looked up I met the eyes of the poor beast quietly looking at me. I felt so lonely and desolate, and he looked so much as if he wanted to be friends, that I got upon my feet at once, clasped my arms about his neck, and kissed him!"

She paused suddenly, and gave a quiet glance from beneath the brim of her hat at her companion's face. During the last minute or so she seemed to be living over again the days of her childhood,

but suddenly she came back to earth again. She was confiding her petty childish griefs to the fashionable young man who was known as the heir of Linne, and he was perhaps laughing at her. But she was mistaken. His face was as grave as her own; he was becoming more and more interested in her, and when she paused he looked up astonished.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, sir, after that," she continued quickly, "Brawnet and I became great friends, and life at the Castle was not so dull to me as it had been before. I used to fill my pocket with bread, and go down to the field every day to feed my new friend, who always looked for my coming, and seemed glad when I was by.

"The servants told me to avoid him, that he was a vicious brute, that he had nearly killed his last master, and was even beyond the management of the laird. But he was never vicious to me; indeed, he soon became the only companion I found in my new home. The moment my breakfast was over, I would race off to the field, with my pocket full

of bread and sugar, to feed Brawnet; and when I had fed him, I would leap upon his back, and he would race round the moor, throwing up his head and neighing like one gone daft. But my happiness didn't last."

She paused, and then continued—

"Sandie met me on my way to the paddock. 'Miss Marjorie,' he said, 'I have news. Yon brute's sold.' 'Sold!' I cried. 'Do you mean Brawnet?' 'Ay, Brawnet,' he continued; 'and what for no'? The laird is over saving to keep a brute that's good for naught but feeding, so make much of him until he's ta'en awa'.' And he walked away and left me. I did not move. I could not, for I was choking with rage and sorrow. When I could conquer myself, I turned my face from the field where Brawnet was awaiting me; but, ten minutes after, I stood in the laird's room.

"'You shall not send Brawnet away!' I cried. 'If you do, you may send me with him, for I will not stay here. If he is vicious with you, it is because you have treated him as unkindly as you have treated me. He is gentle

with me because he loves me; but no one could love *you*, for you are a hard, cruel man. He is the only good thing in this wicked place, and if you take him from me, I will not stay. I tell you, I will not stay!' Well, sir, the laird rose from his seat, and stood frowning at me. 'Is the bairn gone mad?' he said; 'then, pointing to the door, cried angrily, 'Leave the room!' But I was not to be scared. 'Yes,' I said, 'I will go, for I do not wish to stay with you. I wish I had never seen you. I wish I had never come here;' and I turned and left him. Leaving the house, I ran to the field, and found Brawnet still looking eagerly for me. I put my arm round his neck, and sobbed, and sobbed! I took no ride that day, but I gave him the contents of my pocket, and when he had eaten it all up, I caressed him again, and wept over him. Suddenly I felt a hand on my shoulders, and, looking up, I again saw the laird. His face was not angry now. He looked curiously at me, and said, in a voice which was not unkind, 'Marjorie, why are ye here? Come home.' I did not answer, but looked

around for Brawnet. He was grazing some distance off. 'He fled away at my approach,' said the laird, noticing my look. 'Maybe he would come if you called him. Try.' I did as he bade me. I walked a few paces away, and held forth my hands, and called his name. In a moment Brawnet came trotting up to me, and when he was near, I laid my hand upon his mane, and turned to the laird. 'Do you want him, sir?' I asked. The laird shook his head. '*I* don't want the brute,' he said, with a strange kind of smile, and walked away muttering to himself."

CHAPTER X.

EDWARD LINNE SHOWS HIS AMIABLE SIDE.

SHE paused again, and for some minutes there was silence. Edward Linne felt rather than saw that the girl was crying. He was not a sentimentalist himself, but he was not averse to seeing a little sentiment in women, especially when its exhibition did not bore him. In this case he was not at all bored.

Although he could not at any time have broken into wild enthusiasm about a child's feeling for a dumb animal, he gained during that recital some knowledge of the people amongst whom he had been suddenly thrown. Besides, by getting the girl to talk about a subject which interested her, he believed he might eventually bring her to talk about one which interested *him*. Anything, he acknowledged, would be better than the cold silence which she had maintained the night before. Besides, he had gathered during this recital one important fact: the girl was evidently not so nearly related to the laird as he at first had feared, if, indeed, she was related to him at all, which he now doubted. She would have no claim upon the estates when they passed into his (Edward Linne's) hands. There was some comfort in this reflection. The very thought of a second claim had almost given him a sleepless night, for he had reflected on the number of creditors who were waiting impatiently for the old laird of Linne to be quietly laid in his tomb.

"Yes, I am afraid I shall have to sell

up," he reflected, looking at the turrets of the old castle, which were dimly distinguishable in the distance; "but I mustn't sell the pony evidently. Well, after all, the brute wouldn't fetch much. I'll present him to her!"

Then he turned to his companion. She had certainly been crying; her lip was still quivering, and there were traces of tears upon her cheek.

"I fear I have made you call up painful memories," he said. "Let us talk of something else."

But the girl smiled sadly, and shook her head.

"It does me good to talk of it," she said, "since I am aye *thinking* of it, and it makes me very unhappy."

"Unhappy—why?"

"Now that he is ill, and now that I love him with all my heart, I cannot bear to think there was a time when I did not love him, and told him that I could never do so."

"Humph! but you see he deserved your anger; and since you are so fond of him, I presume he deserves your affection."

"He has aye been good to me," said

the girl, gently. Then, turning suddenly upon the young man, she said impetuously, "Oh, sir, he is a stern man, I know; but his life has been a troubled one, and I am sure he is not happy. But you are his kinsman and his heir; you are more to him than any one in the world. Try to bring him comfort."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"I have done all that has been asked of me," he said. "He sent for me, and I am here. But you have not finished your story. I know he gave you that pony, for he is here."

"Yes," returned Marjorie, "he gave me Brawnet, or rather, he did not sell him. Every day I went to the field, dreading to find it empty, but it was not. The laird often spoke to me now. Then, after a time, I was sent to a day-school, some miles off, and I used to ride to school and back again on Brawnet's back. 'Marjorie,' said the laird to me one day, 'you have tamed *me*, just as you tamed yon shaggy brute, Brawnet!'"

"He seems to be a strange man," said Linne; "and he appears to have led

a strange life. Has he no intimate friends?"

"None, I think, but Mr. Macgillvray."

"And who the deuce is he?"

"The old man who lives down yonder at the cave."

"Ah, yes, I remember! He came to the Castle this afternoon, and looked at me as if I were a ticket-of-leave man; and then, after giving a grunt of dissatisfaction, walked unceremoniously into my uncle's bedroom. He seemed to be master of the place, though he looked like a servant. A queer friend for my uncle to have, truly! I wonder what it means?"

Marjorie said nothing. She felt they were treading upon dangerous ground, and wished to change the subject; but the young man continued—

"I thought it was strange, when I saw him at the Castle; and now that I hear of the friendship from you, it seems stranger still. They are more like master and servant with a secret between them! Don't you think so?"

He looked at the girl as he spoke, and although she struggled to show no

sign of confusion, she felt that all the blood was deserting her cheeks, and that her hands were trembling. Whether or not he noticed this she did not know; but he continued—

"People have strange secrets sometimes, you know, Miss Marjorie; and Linne Castle is just the kind of desolate, ghost-haunted place which one would expect to contain a family skeleton. Besides, in his younger days, my uncle must have had something to do with his fellow-creatures; he wasn't always an anchorite. What do you say, shall we make inquiries and find out what the skeleton is, just to give ourselves a little employment?"

But the girl shook her head. Then she held forth her hand. "Good-bye," she said; "I must be going away now. I have waited here o'er long."

The young man looked astonished.

"Good-bye!" he said. "Why, we shall meet again in the house, shall we not?"

"Maybe," she said.

"Maybe, indeed! 'Must be,' I prefer to say. I don't mean to let you go until you promise that we shall.

Why, what a hard-hearted young lady you must be, Miss Marjorie! Do you know what you have done? You have held a cup of water to the lips of a thirsty man, and have let him drink; and now you would say, 'Go and die of thirst in the desert, for you shall drink no more.' Come, promise, Marjorie!" he added; and as he mentioned the name without the prefix, the girl's cheeks flushed slightly.

"What must I promise?" said the girl.

"Promise not to avoid me so persistently. Give me a little of your company when the old man does not want it. That is not much to ask."

"No, indeed," returned the girl, stretching out her hand.

He took her hand and pressed it; then, before she knew what he was about to do, he lifted her in his arms and placed her in the saddle.

"*Au revoir!*" he said, smiling, and raising his hat as she rode away. And as she went, as her figure grew dimmer and dimmer in the distance, Edward Linne watched her with a curious expression on his face.

"There is, after all," he murmured, "something more in this than meets the eye; and though my rustic companion appears to be so innocent, she knows more than she cares to tell just at present. Well, she has promised to be companionable—that is something; and if she doesn't impart some news to me before long, I shall begin to think my old charm of manner is gone!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE REVERSE OF THE PICTURE.

When the figures of Brawnet and its rider had faded into the dim distance, and were completely lost to view, Edward Linne began to wonder what he could do to pass away the long, wearisome hours which still remained to be disposed of before the hour for dinner. What could he do? Absolutely nothing, but lie on his back among the heather, smoke a cigar, think of his past life, and speculate as to the future. Neither of these reflections was calculated to bring him much comfort; his past was not

such as he cared to look back upon, while, as to the future, who could tell what that would be?

At present, he acknowledged to himself, the outlook was a little overclouded. If everything had turned out as he had hoped and anticipated, if, on his arrival at Linne Castle, he had found his uncle at his last gasp, with only strength enough to place his hand in benediction on the head of his heir, all would have been well. The young gentleman could have stepped at once into his new position, and, after the funeral was over, could have taken his departure, had he been so disposed, happy in the knowledge of having a decent balance at his banker's, and being in possession of a patrimonial home. This was the future he had in his mind's eye when he had made the journey to Linne Castle; and now, how all was changed! So far from being at his last gasp, the laird seemed likely to linger, if not for months, at least for some weeks to come; while he, the heir, must hang on at Linne Castle in daily and hourly dread of some unforeseen occurrence, which would cause the old millstone—as his nephew irreverently

called him—to alter his will, and leave him, Edward Linne, a beggar. Besides, there was just the possibility of the laird recovering, in which case—

"Confouud it!" cried Edward Linne, "it doesn't bear thinking of. Still, it would be just like the cursed luck which always pursues me. But I won't think of it. I can't mend matters by making myself more miserable than I am; and perhaps, after all, I've nothing to fear. I shall only have to wait a little longer than I had anticipated, that is all; and in the mean time I must make the best of life in this accursed wilderness."

He lit a cigar, threw himself on his back on the heather, and let the sun pour its rays upon his face. It was a splendid day for the moor, and nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to tramp the hills for an hour or so with his gun and dog, and pick up a few birds before dinner; but even that amusement was denied to him. He must play the hypocrite, and affect a sorrow which he did not feel.

He lay for some time, puffing away at his cigar, and trying to banish thought. Then he threw his cigar away, stretched

out his limbs, tilted his hat over his eyes to shade them from the powerful rays, and dozed. But he was still half-conscious of the sounds around him, of the monotonous washing of the sea on the distant shore, of the rustling of the heather beneath the light breath of the breeze.

At last, he jumped to his feet with a start.

"By George! I must have been asleep," he said. Then he looked at his watch. Several hours had passed since Marjorie had left him; he had managed to doze and dream them away somehow. But it was still some time to dinner, and if he took a walk along the seashore it would bring him to the Castle in good time. He started off, reached a circuitous path, which led down the steep face of the cliff, and soon gained the sands below. They were quite deserted, or so they appeared to be; the tide was rising fast, and a salt breeze was blowing in from the sea. Having little time for loitering, he walked somewhat quickly along, picking his way among the rocks and stones, and keeping well up from the water's edge. He

had gone some little distance when he looked at his watch again, and found that he had still time enough to take things more leisurely. Where was the use of hurrying? he said to himself; there would be no chance of seeing Marjorie before dinner. So he clambered up the rocks, and took a seat, turning his face to the sea.

He had sat thus for some minutes, when he was startled by the sound of a woman's voice singing softly.

He looked around, but could see no one. Then he listened, and the sound came again.

"It must be a mermaid," he said laughingly to himself, "or—Marjorie!"

The latter thought made him rise with alacrity to his feet, and make his way along the rocks to the place whence the sound proceeded. The shingly path by which he had come lay on his right, and it was as deserted as it had been when he had passed along. To the left there jutted out a sharp, rocky promontory, passing around which he came upon the creator of the sound which had so startled him.

A young girl, evidently a peasant,

sitting upon a rock, with shoes and stockings in her hand, and dabbling her bare feet in a pool in the sea. He could not see her face, but he noticed the bright gleaming of her reddish-golden hair, since the shawl which had covered her head had been blown back on to her shoulders; and he could just catch the words, which she crooned rather than sang—

"O why left I my hame,
Why did I cross the sea,
O why did I depart
From my ain countree?
I sigh for Scotia's shore,
And I yearn across the sea,
But I canna get ae glint
O' my ain countree!"

Sad and low, as if full of unshed tears, was the voice; in tones as woeful and strange, indeed, a mermaid might have sung, wailing for a mortal lover, like the sea-maid in the ancient Danish ballad.

His first impulse was to go down and accost her, his next to continue his way home. He had not gone many yards, however, when he heard a light footstep behind him, and almost immediately a voice said—

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I should be muckle obliged if you could tell me the time o' day."

Something in the tone of the girl's voice startled Linne strangely. He turned quickly, and faced her. As he did so, she gave a cry of surprise and joy, and stretched forth her hands, calling him by his name.

But he neither moved nor spoke. His face grew livid in its whiteness, and the perspiration stood in beads on his forehead. Seeing this, the girl grew alarmed.

"Edward," she cried, "what ails you? 'Tis me, 'tis Mary, frae the mearns of Kirkmichael. What gaurs you look so pale?"

"You, Mary! *Here!*"

With an effort, he conquered himself, and seized the girl's hands in both of his.

"You startled me," he said; "and no wonder." Then, looking nervously about him, he added, "Tell me, in God's name, what brought you here?"

"I came to seek for *you*."

"For me?"

"Ay; maybe you thought I had

forgotten, but ye ken weel I can *never* forget!"

She paused, as if expecting an answer, but none came. He wanted to think rather than talk, since for the moment he could not decide what it would be best for him to say. The encounter had been so sudden, so unlooked-for, that for the moment he completely lost his self-command. But as he stood looking into the face of the girl who had risen like a spectre before him, the past loomed beyond her like a graveyard giving up its dead.

Fully three years had passed since the two had met, and yet how well he remembered the night of their last parting! As he looked into the girl's face, he seemed to feel her arms clinging about his neck, and to hear her voice sobbing softly, "You will come back, Edward? Oh, say you will come back, or I shall dee!" And he had kissed her tear-stained face, and had given the promise—"Yes, Mary, I will come back." And since that night she had never heard of him again!

"Edward," said the girl, troubled by his silence, "why are you sae dumb?

Hae you nae word o' welcome to gie me after a' these years?"

Again she held out her hands, but this time he did not take them.

"What welcome did you expect?" he asked, coldly. "What is past is past, and should be forgotten. Still, since you have recalled it, tell me what you want. I will do what I can."

It was now the girl's turn to look astonished. Fixing her eyes curiously upon his face, she said wearily—

"I hae had a long tramp the day, and I'm a wee tired, and maybe dazed and dreaming. I dinna understand!"

"Yet my meaning is clear enough," said Linne. "I presume," he continued, looking at her coarse, travel-stained dress and bare feet, "that you want assistance. For the sake of the past, I am willing to help you, but I shall only do so on condition that you leave this place instantly, and promise never to come here again."

The girl looked steadily at him.

"And dae you think, Edward, it is your siller I want? Dae you think I cam' for *that?*"

"I don't know what else you can

want, unless you are mad enough to imagine I am going to repeat the farce of three years ago."

She gave a short, hard laugh.

"And is *that* what you call it, Edward Linne? My faither was right, then. He said ye had come to poison the life o' her you pretended to love. Till the day you crossed my path, I had never grieved and never grat; since then, God help me! I hae kenned nae peace. Look at me, Edward, homeless, friendless, wearifu', and sair spent. Yet my heart was light till noo. I thought I had ae body in the world to dry my tears!"

"And so you have, if you will but be reasonable. Of course I will help you."

"I dinna want your help. Dae ye think it was charity I cam' to seek? Na, I cam' thinking to find an honest, leal-hearted man. But I ken noo what it is you are, and I hope to God I ne'er may see your face again!"

"Then you will go?"

"Ay, ay, I'll gang," she replied, looking him firmly in the face; "but before I gang I shall visit Linne and see

the laird! There is a young lassie there who is as simple as I was mysel'; and I'll speak to *her* as weel before I gang!"

In a moment his face changed. He made one quick step forward, and seized her by the waist.

"What! you threaten, do you?" he said. But quickly changing his tone, he added, "Oh, Mary, Mary, what a little simpleton you are! Didn't you see I was acting, and that I only did it to see if your love was real? And it is, it is! you love me for myself. You are my own Mary still!"

The change was so sudden, that the girl was stupefied.

"Then your heart is the same!" she said. "You've no' forgotten?"

"Forgotten!" he said, passing his hand over her golden hair, and drawing her tenderly to him. "Oh, my darling, how could I ever forget?"

"Then why did you lea' me a' those years, and ne'er send word or line?"

"What could I do?" said Linne, "At first I thought, I will wait till I have good news to send her; but a cursed ill-luck always pursues me, and I

had no good news to send. Then, after a month or so had passed, I looked forward to being able to come back to you when I had good news to bring; but that will soon be over now. There is good luck in store for me at last, I think, Mary. But we are losing time." he said, looking at his watch. "I must be at the Castle in a quarter of an hour, What am I to do with you?"

"Tak' me to the Castle. Wha has the better right?"

"Take you with me to the Castle! Good heavens! no, Mary! Listen! Before I came to this place a few days ago, I was absolutely a beggar—even poorer than you, for my responsibilities were so terrible that my only escape seemed suicide. Now I have a chance of brighter days. The laird is dying, and at his death I shall be his heir. If by any chance he heard of our affection, he would disinherit me, and I should be left to starve."

"Tell him the truth," returned the girl, quietly. "He is a just man, and will acknowledge your wife."

"If I did as you desire, he would disinherit me, and leave us both to

starve; whereas, we have only to wait a little, and I shall be able to put you in your proper position. Come, I am sure you are a sensible little woman. You see all this as I see it, do you not, my darling?"

She dropped her head, and a sob escaped her lips.

"My happiness is aye to come, and ne'er comes," she answered, letting her tears flow freely now. "It's awfu' waitin', waitin'! I canna bear it! What's your will? What is it you wish me to do?"

"Return to your home and wait there quietly until I come for you."

"My hame?" returned the girl, raising her tearful eyes to his face. "I hae nae hame noo!"

"No home!"

"Nane. After you went away and left me, folk whispered to faither that you had beguiled me; and when he taxed me wi' the truth, I couldna defend mysel', for you had made me tak' a solemn oath ne'er to tell that I was your lawfu' wife. Then he drove me from his hoose!"

"Drove you away?"

"Ay; fast closed the door on me, and tell't me he would ne'er open it to me again till I came to him wi' my marriage lines."

"What did you do?"

"What could I dae? I just went across the muir and got a farmer's wife to take me in to watch the kye; for I thought it would be only for a while, and I looked for you to come. I thought you would tak' me back to faither and tell him a'. But I waited and waited, and you didna come. Then ae day I heard that faither was ill, and I went hame, thinking I maun break the promise I had given. But when I reached the hoose faither was dead!"

"Dead!"

"Ay, Edward. I begged them to let me see him, but they wouldna; and my sister Jean did what faither had done—turned me awa' frae the door. After that, I didna heed what became o' me. I waited about the clachan till I saw faither laid in his grave; then I went awa', staying in ae place and anither, until ae day I heard tell o' the laird o' Linne, and asked aboot him, and foond he was your ain uncle, and lived

in Linne Castle far awa'. Then I thought, if I can win till the laird, he will gie me news o' Edward. Weel, I hadna the siller to ride in the train, sae I just tramped it, and then gat a place in a fishing-boat, and I gat to the toon last night. A guid wife hereaboots let me hae a bed. 'Twas she who tell't me the old laird was deeing, and the young laird waitin' to wear his shoon."

"And you told her who you were?"

"Na, na, Edward; I couldna break my oath," she answered.

"And yet just now you threatened to break it."

"Ay, that was when I was mad. My heart was weel nigh broken when I thought you sae unkind!"

"Well, we won't talk of that," said Linne, who was dreading another outbreak, longing to get away from the girl, yet afraid to leave her. "What am I to do with you now, Mary?"

"Shall I just go back to the hillside and stay wi' yon guid wife?"

He hesitated. His chief anxiety was to get her out of the place; for although she had proved to him how steadily she

could keep an oath, he dreaded her continued presence, since he would be compelled to meet her from time to time, and gossip might begin. Still, he had no time now to plan for her future disposal. He had lingered too long already. Perhaps it would be well to adopt her suggestion for the night, he thought, and he could think of some definite plan by the morrow. He looked up to tell her of his decision, and stared in wonder as his eyes rested upon her. Now that the flush which excitement had brought to her cheeks had died away, her face was ghastly in its whiteness, her lips looked quite blue, and there were black rings around her eyes.

"What is the matter?" he said quickly, thinking she was going to faint.

The girl wearily lifted her hand, and pushed her hair off her forehead.

"Maybe I want my dinner," she said, smiling sadly. "The wife gied me a dish o' porritch the morn, and it is a' I hae ta'en since yestreen."

She was absolutely almost starving, but still his thoughts were of his own safety.

"Did the woman that gave you the

lodging know you had no money?" he asked.

"Ay, she kenned it. I couldna give her a bawbee."

"Well, get some other lodging for to-night. Here is some money," he said, placing a few shillings in her hand. "Rest quietly in the town till to-morrow night after sunset, then meet me again *here*. Do you understand?"

"Ay, I understand."

"And you will do it?"

"Ay, ay!" she murmured sadly.

"Well, good-bye," he said, taking her hand in his and pressing it gently; then he turned on his heel and walked quickly away.

Could he have seen the girl's face as he did so he would have lingered a moment to give her a more tender adieu; but he was blind with selfish dread.

As his figure faded from her sight, the girl gave one piteous moan, and sank sobbing on the shore.

ROYAL ASIAT

CHAPTER XII.

A COTTAGE INTERIOR.

At last the girl dried her eyes, and rising from the ground, made her way wearily from the seashore. Heedless of Linne's orders, she went straight to the cottage where she had slept on the preceding night — a small, one-story building, standing with several other detached cottages of the same class, on the side of a mountain burn. It was, indeed, the very place where Lizzie Campbell and her son had dwelt twenty years before. A new tenant dwelt within it, otherwise it was but little changed. The woman of the house, a widow of fifty years, was seated at the door, knitting. As Mary approached, she looked up with a nod and a smile.

"Sae you hae come back, lassie," she said. "Weel, I thought I had seen the last o' ye, since ye stayed awa' so lang. Come awa' ben, for you look sair spent; ye shall hae a bit supper wi' me this night."

She rose and entered the cottage, and

without a word the girl followed her, and took her seat on a stool beside the hearth. Though the cottage was poor enough, consisting as it did merely of two small rooms, with earth for flooring, and rotting rafters overhead, everything was neat and in its place. A cloth of coarse linen covered the rude bench which served for a table; a few sods of peat lay smouldering on the hearth; beside them stood a large black pot, half full of steaming potatoes. Laying her knitting aside, the woman proceeded to place upon the table two iron spoons and a couple of dishes; then she lifted the lid of a large wooden box which stood in a corner, and took from it a bowl of milk and some scones; finally, the potatoes were turned out and set steaming on the board.

"Come awa', lassie," said the woman, kindly, as she took her seat at the table, and invited Mary to do likewise. "There's a scone till ye, and a sup o' new milk. Ye need food badly, or I'm sair mista'en."

In response to the invitation, the girl rose, and pulled her chair to the table. Before eating, however, she drew from

her pocket the few shillings which Linne had given her, and placed them before her hostess. The woman looked astonished.

"I bade ye eat and be welcome," she said. "I didna ask for siller."

"You're ower kind to me," answered the girl, quietly; "and 'tis na' good for me to tak' charity frae you when I hae the siller to pay."

"You hadna a bawbee yestreen," continued the woman, "and noo ye hae siller! I hope 'twas weel gotten, lassie?"

The look on the girl's face seemed to satisfy her, for she continued—

"The Laird aboon kens good frae evil, and I think I see His proper mark upon ye. You hae the look of an honest lassie! Eat your supper, and keep your siller for harder times. Ay me, ye mind me muckle o' a lass of my ain, deid these ten years."

She pushed the money towards the girl, filled her plate with potatoes, and, dividing the milk into separate bowls, gave her one; but, as Mary positively refused to eat unless she was allowed to pay, the woman was at last persuaded to accept a shilling. It would more

than pay for the food, she said, while, as for the bed, why, if the lassie didn't sleep in it, it would be empty. So the dispute ended, and the two began to eat.

During the meal Mary uttered scarcely a word; but the garrulous hostess talked away, all the while, however, keeping her shrewd eyes upon the girl, whose drooping spirits seemed to revive with every mouthful of food.

Suddenly there was an interruption. A clear voice said—

"Can I rest here for the night, goodwife?"

The sound, unexpected as it was, startled both women, who at once turned their eyes in the direction whence it proceeded. It came from the doorway, in the shadow of which stood a man—young, tall, and well built. He wore a shabby coat of rough tweed and a loose woollen shirt; he had no waistcoat, but a broad leather belt was fastened round his waist; a loose red scarf was thrown rightly around his comely neck, and his head was covered by a broad black wide-awake. He stood looking at the two women who sat at the table, and as neither answered his question, he repeated it.

"Guess I'm a bit played out," he said, "and don't want to go any further. Will you take me in?"

"Come ben, young man," said the goodwife, rising to her feet. "You're no' of these pairts, I'm thinking?"

"No, goodwife; I come from beyond the sea."

"From America, maybe?"

"Yes, from thereabout. Well, can you give me a night's shelter?"

"Ay, and welcome, laddie, since you hae come sae far," returned the woman; "but 'tis a poor place ye ken—jest a but and a ben."

Without waiting for a more pressing invitation, the man entered the kitchen, and, removing his hat, gazed curiously around. As he stood thus in the full light the woman saw him more distinctly. He was a handsome young fellow, of not more than five or six and twenty; his hair and beard, which he wore long, were bright golden; his eyes clear blue; but his face, neck, and hands were burnt brown, as if with exposure to tropical suns.

Large earrings of ruddy gold hung in his ears, and on his hands were several rings of the same metal. His manner

was bold and careless, as of one accustomed to shoulder his way fearlessly among rough men, and his eyes and mouth, though not ungentle, were full of determination.

While he gazed curiously about him, the woman hastily put together the few potatoes and scones that were left, and brought out another bowl of milk.

"Will ye tak' a wee bit supper?" she said, looking at him again, and wondering whether she should address him as an equal or a superior; while Mary quietly rose from the table, and returned to her seat by the fire.

Throwing his wideawake hat carelessly aside, the stranger took the seat which the girl had vacated, and began to dispose rapidly of the few eatables which were placed before him, while the women sat by, watching him curiously. When he had finished his meal, he drew from the breast pocket of his coat a bright blue silk handkerchief, and carelessly wiped his beard; then he looked up and, encountering the eyes of his hostess, he smiled.

"Well, goodwife," he said; "I guess you were thinking I'd a good appetite?"

"Ay, and I was thinkin' too, maybe, it wasna the first time you had drunk a bowl of Scotch milk. Are you a stranger to these pairts, sir?"

"Guess I should be," he answered, carelessly; "since, as I have told you, I come from America."

"Ay, ay, I mind," she answered, brightening up at once. "Then, maybe, ye ken the black pits o' Pennsylvania? I have a laddie o' my ain there, sir; ay, as braw a laddie as ever wore shoon. He went away this ten years, come term-day, and I'm thinkin' some day I shall see him back agin, just steppin' into the house as you did yoursel' the noo. Weel, you're heartily welcome here for his sake, and your ain," she added; "sae just set ye doon in the ingle, and tak' your pipe while I put the things aside; and then, maybe, you'll tell me a bit aboot the place where my boy stops."

He rose from the table, and as he did so, he again gave that curious look around him. He seemed to be trying to recall something which was forgotten. This time the woman noticed the look.

"Have you lived long here?" he said, carelessly.

"'Tis near on twenty years since I cam' to the cottage. Before me there was one Lizzie Campbell dwelt here. She was a sorrowfu' woman, and she had a son, a wee laddie wha folk said wasna born in the shadow o' the kirk. Weel, the puir lassie and her bairn went awa' to America, but they never reached there, for the big ship went doon, and they were drooned at sea."

To this the man did not reply. He swaggered over to the fire, and lifting a burning sod of peat, lit a black briar-root pipe which he had been filling, while the woman, having scattered a few cold potatoes among half a dozen ragged hens, took her seat on a stool in the ingle, and recommenced to work upon the knitting, which Mary's appearance at the cottage had caused her to lay aside.

"You hae friends in these pairts, maybe?" she said, again addressing the stranger.

He laughed.

"I can't find many friends anywhere, goodwife," he replied; "but I've business at Linne Castle, and since you'll let me bide here for the night, I'll make my way there in the morning."

"To Linne Castle?" said the woman, amazed; "that's unco' strange, for here's a lassie wi' business there too!"

"Is that so?" he replied. "I thought this was your daughter."

"My daughter? Na; I hae but ae bairn livin', and he's far awa' in yon strange land. This is jest a puir lassie that's bidin' here for the night, like yoursel'. But dae ye ken, sir, that the laird o' Linne is deeing?"

"Dying, is he?" answered the stranger. "Well, I suppose the world has spared better men!"

"The laird's no' an angel, if that's what you mean, sir. He hae aye been hard on the poor; and folk say," she continued, in a confidential tone, "'twas the laird himsel' had a hand in the doonfa' o' poor Lizzie Campbell. Weel, nae man kenned the rights o' that. But the day has come noo when the laird will reap what he has sown. 'Tis poor wark to lie on a death-bed wi' a black conscience, and only a stranger to wear the shoon that you put aside. There's the heir o' Linne waitin' in ae room, and the old laird deeing in anither. If ye hae business wi' the laird, ye should

gang quick to the Castle, for he isna long for this warld."

Then turning to the girl, she added—

"Did ye get news of the laird the day, lassie?"

The girl started. From the moment the stranger entered the room she had quietly retired to the chimney corner, where she had sat with her face partly hidden, listening to all that was said. She looked up, and found the eyes of the stranger fixed curiously upon her. For a moment she returned his look, then she flushed slightly, and turned away.

"I cam' to see the young heir, no' the auld laird."

"The young heir?" returned the stranger, in a curious tone; "and who may *he* be, my good girl?"

"He's jest a young gentleman," cried the goodwife, interposing, "wha cam' to the place a few days syne. Folk say he's nephew to the laird, and since he bears his name he'll hae the siller; but, if the laird did right, 'twould all go to Miss Marjorie. She's just been as good as a daughter to him, and shouldna be beggared for a stranger."

"Miss Marjorie?" said the stranger.

"There's a pretty good houseful of them, I reckon! And how long has Miss Marjorie, as you call her, been there?"

"Since she was a wee lassie, ten lang years past. It was Willie Macgillvray brought her to the Castle when she was a bairn. She hasna had a gay life, ye ken, jest leevin' wi' the laird, but she's a leal lassie, and she's just the sunshine o' the place."

Here, either accidentally or by design, the young man yawned, and the woman added—

"But I see you're o'er weary for muir talking, sir, and the puir lassie's weary too. I'll just place the beds for the night."

So saying, she rose and began to move about, making the necessary preparations.

There was in the kitchen a press bed in the wall, which she arranged for the young man; then, when all was ready, she gave him a kindly good night, and retired with the girl to the inner room, where they were to rest together.

Left alone in the kitchen, the stranger rose, and looked around him with evident curiosity, examined the black rafters, the

bare walls, the rude furniture of the chamber. Then, as if satisfied, he sighed heavily, walked to the door, and looked out. The moon was shining brightly over the neighouring hills, and the brook at the foot of the brae was filling the air with its low murmuring.

"Men die and pass away," he muttered to himself, "but the old landmarks do not change. I seem to remember everything I see; but it's like a dream."

For a long time he stood looking sadly out into the night, then he closed the door, threw himself upon the bed without undressing, and slept soundly until dawn.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE YOUNG CANADIAN.

EARLY next morning, when the woman entered the kitchen, she was rather astonished to find that her male visitor had gone, and without leaving word or message of any kind behind him. It seemed an abrupt leave-taking, but the man had strange ways; so, without

further speculation, the goodwife at once set about tidying up the kitchen and making ready for breakfast. There was little to do, and when, some half an hour later, the door of communication between the two rooms opened again, and the girl appeared, the kitchen looked as neat and tidy as it had done on the previous day. The bed which had been given to the stranger showed no sign of having been used at all. There were fresh potatoes steaming in the pot by the fire, and bowls of new milk on the table. To crown all, there was the kindly goodwife bustling about, with her usual bright face and pleasant smile.

The girl looked more composed than she had done on the previous day. She had dressed herself with some care, and as she came forward, and the full sunlight fell upon her through the window frame, the woman looked at her with undisguised admiration in her eyes.

"Eh, but you're a bonnie lassie," she said, taking the girl's face between her hands and kissing her on the forehead.

But the girl maintained her usual silence, and the two sat down to breakfast. Scarcely had they taken their

seats, however, when the visitor of the night before appeared on the threshold. The woman looked astonished.

"Sae you're hereawa' again, after a'," she said. "I thought maybe you'd gane to Castle Linne, and that we had seen the last o' ye, young man!"

"I've been having a stroll by the sea," he said; "and now I'm ready for breakfast. It's too early for a visit to Linne Castle, I guess. People with bad consciences lie late, they say."

He entered the room, removed his hat, and took his seat at the table. When the meal was over, he placed a piece of silver beside his plate, rose, took his hat, lit his pipe, and announced his intention to depart.

"I suppose," he said, "I can have the bed again, good woman?"

"And welcome," answered the hostess. "Are you thinkin' of biding lang hereaboots?"

"I don't know. I've got a job to do, and I must wait till 'tis done."

"But maybe you'll be staying wi' the servants at Linne Castle?"

A curious look came into the man's eyes.

"Linne Castle?" he replied. "Guess that isn't for me, or the likes o' me. We'll leave fine houses and snug rooms to our betters, goodwife—to them that can buy hearts and sell lives, and who, when their miserable days are spent, die with the certainty of Hell before them!"

The woman looked fairly amazed. The man before her seemed to have utterly changed. The expression of his face was dark and revengeful, his right hand was clenched, and he was trembling with passion.

"It is na' becoming to talk like that," said the woman. "If the laird has sinned, maybe he has repented."

"And what if he has? What will his repentance do? Will it heal the hearts he has broken, or mend the lives he has destroyed? Will it bring one glint of happiness to those who lie cold in their graves? No; if there is a just God above us, there is no rest for such men, even though on their death-beds they repent to save their miserable souls!"

Then, noticing the scared look on the woman's face, he added lightly—

"Don't mind my chatter, good wife. I come of a rough stock, and I'm a bit rough in my talk at times. Well, I am off to the laird now." Then, turning to the girl, he added, "You've got business at the Castle too, my lass? Will you walk with me across the hill?"

The girl turned away.

"I hae nae business at the Castle," she said.

"Then your errand is done?"

"Ay, 'tis done," returned the girl, still keeping her face averted.

"Will you be for ganging awa' the day, lassie?" asked the woman.

"Maybe," returned the girl, evasively and very sadly.

"Weel, I shall miss you. 'Tis mony a lang day since my hoose has looked so cheerie as with yoursel' sitting in it. When I look at ye, I'm thinking of my poor lass that's in her grave and of my poor boy that's awa' in a foreign land."

"You mentioned one Willie Macgillvray last night," said the young man, interrupting her. "I fancy I've heard tell of the name."

"If ye kenned folk wha came frae these parts, you hae certainly heard o'

it, for a'body kens Willie. He's an auld man now, ye ken, but he's a good man, sir, for all his strange ways."

"Does he dwell hereabouts?"

"Ay, in a place that's little fitted for a scholar like himsel'. 'Tis jest a wee bit cave in the hill. But Miss Marjorie gangs to see him, and folks say the laird has been there whiles, to ease his guilty mind by confessing his sins to Willie the Hermit."

"Folk hereabout seem to be pretty busy with other people's affairs," said the man, with a careless laugh. "Guess I'll have to be pretty spry, or they'll begin to discuss *me!*"

"And what for no'?" returned the woman, laughing.

"Well, I guess I'd better be off, anyhow," said he. Then, turning to the girl, he added, "I'm off straight to Castle Hunger. I can leave a message for you, my girl, if you want to send one."

"Na, na," answered the girl, quickly. "Dinna heed my message or *me*." Then blushing crimson with confusion, she turned away.

The young man, after looking at

her curiously for a moment, turned to go.

Accompanying him to the threshold, the woman pointed out to him the shortest road to the Castle; then bidding him a cheery good morning, and expressing a hope that he would return soon, she re-entered the house, and set about her labours for the day.

Meanwhile, the young man pursued his way, half carelessly, yet with ever quickening steps, like one who is hurried to a point which he dreads to gain. Sometimes he paused and looked about him, and as he did so his face wore a curious, puzzled look, as if he were trying to remember a half-forgotten dream; then at last, his eyes, in sweeping over the landscape, rested upon the towers of Linne Castle, and he gave a sinister kind of smile.

"I have more to do than I bargained for," he said. "To tell a few unpleasant truths to a man on his death-bed is like warring with a woman. I thought it would be man to man. If I had met him on the hillside, even altho' his hair had whitened and his face had lined with age, I could have said my say; but

to hiss it into the ear of a man who is struggling with death is another matter. And yet, why should I pause? I am only doing my duty!"

He walked on more quickly, switching the heather with his stick as he went; and as he came well within sight of the building, his face grew harder and harder, for his thoughts were busy with the past.

"This is the road *she* has trod," he said to himself, "with sore heart and aching limbs, many and many a time, a wretched supplicant for mercy which never came. I wonder if he thinks of all this as he lies yonder? Then there's that girl I met in the cottage. Who can she be, I wonder? Looks as if the old play was being enacted over again. I should like to make the acquaintance of the heir of Linne, and I mean to keep my eye upon the girl also. She has got a tell-tale face, and will never be able to hide her secret long."

Ere long he was within a dozen yards of the house, and he paused, as if uncertain what to do. All the windows and doors were closed, and there was no sign of a living soul; and the silence

around was so deathly that, when the stranger uttered his thoughts aloud, his voice rang out with strange distinctness.

"If I could only see the heir or 'Miss Marjorie,'" he said, with a smile, "my work would be just a bit easier, I fancy! Sounds rather queer to tell a servant you've made a call on his master, who happens to be dying. That's what I've got to do, though, unless—— By heavens, here's the very vision I was looking for!" he added, as the front door opened noiselessly, and Marjorie herself appeared upon the threshold.

Her whole appearance betokened anxiety and a protracted night watch. Instead of her usual tight-fitting dress, she wore a loose grey wrapper, and stray tresses of her hair, which had been hastily fastened up at the back, fell upon her shoulders; her face was pale, and her eyes red with weeping; yet, as she tripped lightly down the steps and approached the stranger, he thought he had never seen a countenance so lovely.

"Can this be Miss Marjorie?" he said, unconsciously uttering his thoughts aloud again.

The girl looked surprised.

"Yes, I am Marjorie. Do you know me?" she said, looking at the stranger from head to foot.

He took off his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "No, I do not know you. I had heard of a Miss Marjorie living in Linne Castle, and, when I saw you, I uttered my thoughts aloud."

"You are a stranger?"

"Yes, I am a stranger, and have business with the laird of Linne."

The girl turned her head away to hide the tears which sprang to her eyes.

"The laird is very ill, sir," she said. "They say he is dying. All the night through I have been beside him, thinking every breath would be his last; but now the bad spasms have passed away, and he is more at rest. When I saw you from the window, I came out quickly, lest you should knock and disturb him. His business in this world is done. He must be left at peace now."

"Yet I have a message for him which, if he is still alive, he ought to hear."

"Could you give me your message, sir? If I find he is able to listen to it, he shall hear it. The sight of a strange

face would disturb him and do him harm."

But the stranger was persistent.

"My message is only for the ears of the laird," he said, firmly.

The girl looked curiously at him.

"Is it a message that will cheer him and bring him comfort?" she asked.

"God knows! Anyhow, he must hear it."

He looked at her as if he expected she would move aside and invite him to enter the house, but she did not do so; and when he made a movement as if to pass her by, she laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"Think, sir, what you would do," she said. "He is an old man; let him die in peace. If you will give me your message, I will take it to him, but you cannot and shall not see him."

"I guess you do wrong to keep me here," said the man. "I come from Canada, and I bring a message from one John Mossknow might like to hear about before he dies."

The girl looked at him more curiously. Suddenly a new light broke upon her face.

"You come from one who knew the laird?"

"Ay, from one who knew him well!"

"Oh, tell me, sir, is it possible that you bring news of his son?"

It was now the young man's turn to look astonished.

"His son?" he said. "What son?"

"His son who was driven from his home many years ago. The laird has told me about him. It would bring him comfort to hear of him, if he lives!"

The young man looked on the ground as he answered—

"My message is not from his son, but it is important; and, though the laird were at his last gasp, I must speak to him before he dies."

A step on the gravel walk attracted their attention. Turning quickly, Marjorie saw Edward Linne. He looked at the stranger questioningly from head to foot.

"You seem to be a stranger to these parts," he said, "and I should advise you to make yourself a stranger to Linne Castle. What do you want?"

"I want to see the laird," was the reply.

"Then you cannot see him. The young lady has told you so, no doubt; and, take my word for it, the young lady is right. It is not the custom for dying men to receive strange visitors, I think, and the old man is sinking fast."

Without another word, Linne moved away and re-entered the house. The stranger turned with a smile to Marjorie.

"Who is our amiable friend?" he asked.

"That is Edward Linne, the laird's nephew and heir."

"Indeed! The prospect of coming into so much wealth should have a better effect upon his temper, unless he is tired of waiting, as those who look for dead men's shoes usually are. But, come, do you intend to copy the manners of that puppy, and persist in turning me from the door?"

"Oh, sir, I am anxious to do what is right," answered the girl. "If I thought the laird would not be pained to see you——"

"Then, as you are so fearful, suppose we let the laird decide for himself. Will you give him a message from me? Then, if he refuses to see me, I will go."

To this the girl consented. The stranger produced a pencil and a piece of loose paper from his pocket, and wrote down the following words :—

"*A messenger from Canada, bringing news from one the laird knew well long ago.*"

Folding the paper, he handed it to Marjorie, who hastened up to the laird's room.

In a very short space of time she returned, and found the stranger standing bareheaded in the hall.

"The laird will see you," she said, "and Donald will show you to his room."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAIRD AND THE HERMIT.

From the moment that he crossed the threshold of Castle Linne, the young man's manner, always free, bold, and suggestive of a rough life spent among rough men, became even rougher and bolder; and, without removing his hat, he swaggered upstairs after the old servant, taking little heed to step lightly

on the oaken staircase, and looking round him with a careless frown.

Reaching the door of the laird's chamber, the servant knocked gently, and then, opening the door, showed in the stranger, who, still with his hat set boldly on his brows, found himself face to face with the master of the Castle.

A few short hours had wrought a painful change in the old man's condition. His face was white as marble, his eyes were dim and sunken, while, lying back upon the pillows of the rude uncurtained bed, he breathed heavily, as if in pain. But weak and spent as he seemed, something of his old fire remained, and flamed up in the dim orbs which he fixed eagerly upon the stranger.

"Who are ye," he cried feebly, "that would force yourself unbidden into the presence of a sick and maybe a dying man? Come closer, that I may hear what news you bring."

The young man approached the bedside. His face wore a curious expression of mingled pity and contempt.

"Take off your bonnet, man!" cried the laird.

The young man smiled grimly, and with a careless gesture swept off his hat, showing a high, fair brow and lightly flowing ringlets.

"I come from America," he said, "and I bring a message to John Mossknow, the laird of Linne."

"A message? Who sends it?"

"One who knew you long ago—Lizzie Campbell, once a dweller in these parts."

"Lizzie Campbell!" echoed Mossknow, while his grim face twitched convulsively. "What ken *you* of Lizzie Campbell? I knew one of that name, who was drowned in the great storm, twenty years ago."

"Are you sure she was drowned?" returned the other, with the same grim smile. "The ship went down, but the woman you knew was saved."

"How ken you that?" cried the laird, trembling like a leaf. "Speak, man—quick!"

"Because I have talked with her many a time, and knew her well."

The laird sat up erect, glaring at the young man's face and stretching out his palsied hands.

"And her son! her son! Tell me of him! Was the boy spared, too?"

"My message is from the mother, not the son. If the son was drowned, his was the better fate, for he did not live to share his mother's shame."

"Tell me the truth!" gasped the laird. "My son! Does my son live?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"I knew one Robert Campbell out in Canada. I never knew that he claimed to be kin of yours."

"Don't torture me," cried Mossknow. "Man, man, have pity on my grey hairs, and let me ken the truth."

"Give me time, and you shall hear all I know. First, then, of Lizzie Campbell. She died last winter, after many a year of sorrow, among her kin in the west; but, before she died, she gave a message for me to bring, should I ever see Scotland, where she was born. 'Tell John Mossknow,' she said, 'tell him, if he still lives (and the hard heart is hard to kill!), that for twenty years I have spoken no word and left no sign. I had outlived my hope, which withered up the day I sailed from home. But I would still have John Mossknow acknowledge, for my son's sake, that I was once, in the sight of God, his wife,

and that, when I gave him my troth and gave birth to his seed, I did so believing he would keep his plighted word.'"

The young man paused. In spite of his efforts to deliver the message without betraying any signs of agitation, his voice grew choked as he proceeded, and his face showed the wild lights and shades of strong internal passion. And every word he spoke went like a knife into the heart of the laird, who, without looking at the speaker, fixed his dim eyes on vacancy, and plucked with tremulous fingers at the coverlet of the bed.

"Was that all?" he murmured, after a time, still not looking at the stranger.

"All that I remember. I wrote the words down that I might not forget them. A little afterwards the poor woman died, and carried the story of her sufferings to Him who is the Judge of quick and dead."

"What is your will of me?" cried Mossknow, suddenly looking up. "I understand the message—what then?"

"Nothing more," returned the other. "I have done my duty. The rest lies with you. Did the woman speak the truth?"

Mossknow did not answer. His

thoughts again seemed far away. The young man turned from the bedside and stood at the window, which commanded a dreary prospect of moor and mountain. As he paused thus, with his back to the laird, the evil shadow seemed to pass from his face, his lips trembled nervously, his eyes were moist with tears.

"You have told me nothing," said Mossknow, suddenly; "nothing of what I seek to know. I asked you of my son. Think you he still lives?"

"He may live," answered the young man, not turning round; "but better for him if he is dead."

"The hand of death is on me," said Mossknow. "I am a dying man. I would willingly make atonement for the past."

"Too late for that!"

"Why do you say that?" cried Mossknow. "Why do you come here to torture me? Did *she* bid ye?"

The young man turned slowly and looked towards the bed.

"She bore her sorrows like a saint," he answered. "She never complained, and she died forgiving the man who had wrecked her life."

"And the boy—my son?"

"Do you think he forgave you? Do you think, if he had a man's heart, he could pardon the father who sent him out into the world a bastard? No! On his mother's grave, he swore——"

He paused suddenly and moved towards the bed. The old man sat erect, with eyes wide open and arms extended.

"Come closer, closer, that I may look at ye! My old eyes are dim—I cannot see your face! Bend down, man, bend down!"

The young man instantly obeyed, and put his face close to that of the laird, who clutched him wildly, crying—

"Your name? Tell me your name?"

The other whispered in his ear. The next moment, with a gasping cry, Mossknow fell back upon his pillow without a sign of life.

A minute later, the stranger passed from the room, and stood at the head of the stairs.

"Below there!" he called. "Come up, some of you. Your master is dying!"

He re-entered the chamber, and the

next moment Marjorie and Edward Linne joined him there. Placing his finger on his lips, he pointed to the bed. Grim and gaunt as a skeleton, the laird lay as if dead, his grey hair strewn upon the pillow, his eyes wide open but sightless, his thin arms spread upon the coverlet.

With a low cry, Marjorie knelt by the bed, and took one of the lifeless hands.

"Speak to me, sir! It is Marjorie! Oh, he is dead; he is dead!"

Edward Linne and the stranger stood together by the window.

"What does it mean?" said the former, with a scowl. "What has happened?"

"We were talking together when he fainted as you perceive. He will rally yet, perhaps. Is there a doctor attending him?"

Linne shook his head.

"The old man would have no medical attendant," he replied.

"Well, they kill more than they cure. My business here is done."

He walked over to the bedside. With tears streaming down her cheeks, Marjorie looked up into his face.

"Oh, sir, will he recover?"

"God knows," he replied in a low voice.

At that moment Mossknow stirred, breathing painfully; his fingers twitched nervously, and a faint sound came from his open lips.

"Wet his lips with wine!" said the young man. "I fear he is sinking."

Without another word he left the room, descended the stairs, and passed out at the front door. His face had grown strangely pale and sorrowful. He stood for a moment in the porch, looking out on the lonely prospect; then, with a sigh, walked forth upon the open moor.

Scarcely seeming to heed which way he went, he strode along through the heather, turning once or twice to look back on the grey towers of the Castle. Presently, he reached a country road winding away towards the mountains. He leaped down from the high heather-clad bank, and wandered on thoughtfully. Presently, he paused again, and saw, on the verge of a wood, the board nailed against a tree which intimated to all and sundry that hard by was Willie the Hermit's habitation.

He read the words and smiled. Then, with a brighter face, he entered the wood, stepping lightly and stealthily, and approached the hermitage. The door stood half open. Creeping behind it, so as to be unseen by any one within, he peeped through the wide cranny between its hinges.

Seated on a stool, close to a peat fire which filled the hut with its smoke, was the wild figure of the Prophet. He had an open book upon his knee, and was reading, half to himself and half aloud. For some minutes the young man regarded him; then, with a smile, moved from his hiding place and stood in the doorway.

Willie looked up from his book.

"Who's this trespassing on my property? Can you read, young man? If so, did ye no' perceive the proclamation?"

"I beg your pardon," returned the other, with his old swaggering manner, which he seemed able to assume or dispense with at will. "Hermits are scarce, and I wanted to have a look at one."

Willie closed his book, and rose to his feet.

"Who may you be? By your tongue,

you are not of these parts? But take a good look, young impudence! As you say, hermits are scarce, and prophets scant, in these days o' steam-engines and railway trains."

"You are William Macgillvray, sometimes called Willie the Preacher?"

"All the world kens that," returned Willie, phlegmatically. "So if you have no better business to bring you, gang about your business, and leave me to mine."

The young man laughed good-humouredly.

"And you live here?" he asked, smiling.

"And I live here. Ay, and God willing, I shall die here. Now, march!"

"You are somewhat inhospitable. I am a stranger, and should like to have a talk with you, my friend. By the way, I have just come down from the Castle, where there is likely to be mourning soon; for the old man is at his last gasp."

"Say you so?" returned Willie; "then I'll be going to his bedside. What took *you* to the Castle, young man?"

"Private business."

"With John Mossknow?"

"Certainly."

Willie looked keenly at the speaker, whose wideawake hat was now drawn low down over his forehead, partly concealing his face.

"Few folk have business with John Mossknow. His work in this world is nearly done. Did you see him?"

"Yes," replied the young man, with a nod. "And his adopted daughter, and the amiable young gentleman who is waiting to wear his shoes."

"Dawm *him* for an interloper!" exclaimed the Prophet, adding, with unconscious comicality, "Lord, forgive me for swearing!"

"Damn him with pleasure," said the young man, pulling a wooden pipe out of his pocket, and lighting it coolly. "But why?"

"Mind your own affairs," cried Willie, sharply. "I see you are one of the new generation, in which the monkey predominates o'er the human. Lord Monboddo, a learned idiot, traced such limmers up to the ourang-outang."

"Come, come, that isn't polite!"

"It's no' polite to disturb a gentleman at his devotions, and smoke tobacco at his front door! I have clouted better folk o'er the lugs for less, young man."

The other laughed again, quite merrily.

"For so thorough a hermit your sentiments are a little unchristian."

"I'm in a bad temper," returned Willie, dryly.

"So I perceive. Why?"

"Why, ye limmer? Because, as I sat there reading, my thoughts wandered away from the book, and I was thinking —thinking!"

"What were your thoughts about?"

"I was thinking this world is just a heap of dirt. I was thinking of the awful responsibility of Him that made it. I was thinking that, if I were God, I would put it out like a rushlight, and gang to bed for ever in the dark! Hoomph!"

With a snort indicative of mingled contempt for the world and for his listener, Willie came out, shut the door, and turned the key in the old padlock which fastened it. Then he glanced again at the stranger, who had turned

his back upon him, and was gazing quietly up through the trees.

"Come ye from England, young man?" he inquired. "Your tongue hasna the English ring."

The young man turned quietly.

"I come from across the sea. From the land of the setting sun."

"On an errand to John Mossknow?"

"On an errand to the laird of Linne."

"Who sent ye?" cried Willie, quickly.

"It is your turn now to be inquisitive," said the other, laughing.

"What's your name?"

"I have none, my friend. I have come to look for one."

So saying, he walked from the wood, and stood in the open road. Far away before him stretched the great sea across which he had sailed. Willie followed, muttering to himself, and stood by his side.

"You favour one I kenned long years syne," said the hermit, thoughtfully.

"Man or woman?" asked the stranger.

"Neither one nor other. A bairn, a bit laddie. You have the same bold blue

een, the same fair golden hair. His name was Robin Campbell. I loved him like my own."

"I knew one Robert Campbell out in Canada. Perhaps it is the same."

Willie shook his head sadly.

"No, no; the laddie I speak o' is long dead—drown'd—lying at the bottom of the sea, far, far awa' from the shining o' the sun."

The young man looked upward, and, taking off his hat, stood bareheaded, with the sunbeams pouring upon his fair brow and golden ringlets. Then, with a strange smile, while Willie started in wonder, he uttered the following words—

"Yon's no' the sun, Willie Macgillvray! Yon's GOD!"

The words, the tone, startled the old man as if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet. He uttered a wild cry, and gazed awestruck on the young man's face.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SHADOW FALLS.

WHILE Willie the hermit was being interviewed by the stranger from Canada at the entrance to his cave, the gloom and sorrow were deepening over Linne Castle; for the laird was rapidly nearing his end.

For some time after the stranger had left the sick room the old man lay motionless, with his dim eyes fixed in a death-like stare. Marjorie, on her knees beside the bed, pressed the thin, cold hands, and sobbed piteously, naming his name, but he neither moved nor spoke; while on the other side of the bed stood Edward Linne, watching with a curious expression the heavy, stertorous breathing of the dying man.

Presently, attracted by the piteous sobbing of the girl, he went to her, and lifted her from the ground.

"Come away, my girl," he said, tenderly. "This is no place for you."

But Marjorie resisted.

"Don't take me away from him!" she

cried, hysterically. "Indeed, indeed, I must stay!"

"Then you must cease fretting," he whispered. "Come, be brave. You have been expecting this for weeks. It is better for him that it has come."

He placed her in an arm-chair which stood near the bedside; then he went to the bed, placed his fingers on the old man's pulse, and again looked with cold curiosity at the face. The eyes were now looking straight at him, and were full of recognition.

"He has recovered consciousness," he said, nervously shrinking back.

In a moment Marjorie was by the bedside. She clasped the thin hand in both of hers, and gazed tenderly down upon the old man. As she did so, the light in his eyes grew softer, and his lips moved.

"He is speaking!—he wishes to say something!" cried Marjorie, bending low, that she might catch the words of the dying man. But she heard nothing. "What is it, sir?" she asked, softly. "Do you wish to speak? have you something to say to me?"

The head moved slightly, as if in assent.

"What is it?" she asked again, as she placed her ear closer to the old man's lips.

The heavy breathing continued, but she could not hear a word.

"Oh, it is terrible!" she cried, while the laird, still making violent efforts to speak, turned his eyes in piteous entreaty from one face to another. "What shall I do?"

"You can do nothing," said Linne, "but leave him to die in peace."

"But he wishes to say something, and cannot."

"No," said Linne; "I don't think he will speak again." For the eyes were already becoming dim, and were fixed again into that vacant stare. "Come, Marjorie," he continued, again placing the girl in the arm-chair, "this is not the sort of scene for you; but, if you will stay, you must be reasonable. If you cry so much you will make yourself ill."

He placed himself between the arm-chair and the bed, so as to hide the girl's view of the dying man; but it was unnecessary, for Marjorie's face was buried in her handkerchief. For some

time no one spoke; Linne was soon lost in his own thoughts, and Marjorie lay exhausted in the chair.

Suddenly both started. There was a hurried footstep on the stairs, and the next moment the figure of Willie Macgillvray stood in the doorway.

With a cry of joy Marjorie sprang to meet him, but the old man, whose manner was full of strange excitement, quickly put her aside, and approached the bed.

"Are ye living, John Mossknow?" he said. "Tell me, are ye living, and do ye ken what it is I say?"

The eyes, still fixed and vacant, gave no sign of recognition.

"He lives, but he doesna hear me," said Willie, sorrowfully. "Tell me, Marjorie, my doo, has he been long like this?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "A while ago he recovered consciousness, and tried to speak to me, but only his lips moved, for I could not hear a sound. Oh, Mr. Macgillvray, will he never speak again?"

"The Lord knows," answered the old man, reverently. "And now leave the

room both of you, for I want to be with him alone!"

Marjorie looked at Linne, who replied, "I refuse to leave the room, and should like to know by what right you order me to do so?"

Willie looked up at him with a curious expression, full of contempt and dislike.

"You craw o'er soon, and you're no' the master yet, young man," said he. "But gang your ways; or if ye will *not* gang, then stay and welcome."

"Shall I go, Willie?" asked the girl.

"No, Marjorie," he answered; "but keep away from me, lassie, for I have something to say to the laird."

Then, bending over the old man, he said—

"If ye ken who is by ye and who speaks till ye, make a sign."

He watched earnestly, but no sign came; except for the regular breathing the man showed no indication of life. Willie thereupon moved from the bedside, and walked excitedly up and down the room, muttering to himself. Now and again he paused, and gave a curious look at the young man who stood so calmly watching the death throes of his

kinsman. Presently Willie approached the bed again; this time he uttered an exclamation of delight. Once more the eyes were full of recognition.

"Keep back, both of you!" he said; "keep back! I have something to say to the laird."

He bent low and whispered in the old man's ear. Then he looked into the filmy eyes again.

"He kens what it is I'm saying," cried Willie. "Thank the Lord, he kens!"

But even as he spoke, the laird uttered a deep sigh, and his jaw fell.

"Marjorie, my bairn," said Willie, as he reverently bowed his head, "say a prayer, if you can; the laird is dead!"

It was indeed true. As Linne stepped hastily forward and laid his fingers upon the pulse, it ceased to beat.

"Yes, he is dead," he repeated, with a sigh of relief. Then he turned nervously away, as if to shut out the ghastly sight before him.

So the shadow which passes from dwelling to dwelling fell upon Linne Castle.

Persuaded by Willie, Marjorie was induced to retire to her room, where, thoroughly exhausted with the fatigue of the night, she at last sobbed herself to sleep; while throughout the house, despite the moving hither and thither of the servants who were in attendance on the body of the laird, there was that hushed silence which ever accompanies death. Yet it was simply the old story over again—"Le Roi est mort: Vive le Roi!" for while in the room above the body of the old laird was receiving the ghastly honours of the dead, in the dining-room below stood the young laird, his heart expanding with joy at the position he believed he had attained.

"I'm glad it's over—very glad it's over," he said to himself; "for at times I began to be afraid the old man might recover, and so disappoint me after all. And now the question is, what am I to do? Sell up and be off, or linger here a bit, and live like a country squire? And Marjorie—what is to become of Marjorie? I know what I should like to do with her, but unfortunately I'm bound hand and foot. . . . And that reminds me! Mary is to meet me again

to-night; and I must keep the tryst, too, or heaven knows what the little babbling fool may be induced to do if she hears of the old man's death. Well, I've time to have something to eat, and then I'll slip off; no one will see me. And suppose they do? who has a right to question my movements now? No one. I am master of the situation—absolute master; only, to avoid a scandal, I must keep the girl away."

He rang the bell, and assuming a tone of command which made the old servant start and stare at him in wonder, ordered a repast to be prepared for him at once.

"Stay," he said, as the old man was retiring. "How is Miss Marjorie?"

"She's lockit up in her ain room, Mr. Edward."

"Well, tell your wife to remain in attendance upon her. It is my wish that she should be treated in every way as she was before the laird died."

"I'll do as you bid me, Mr. Edward," said the old man, groaning as he left the room.

"And now," said Linne to himself, when the door had closed and the old

man was out of hearing, "I suppose I shall be expected to pay another visit upstairs. Well, it isn't a pleasant performance; but it won't have to be often repeated, and I may as well make the best of it."

Assuming a becoming air of sadness, he opened the door, and passed quietly up the stairs to the room where his uncle was lying.

How everything was changed! The room was now in perfect order; while the old man, his grey hair smoothed from his brow, his hands crossed upon his breast, lay like a statue upon the bed.

But beside the bed stood Willie Macgillvray, soliloquizing aloud—

"It's all over now, John Mossknow," he said. "We have long expected the end, and yet 'tis come just a day too soón. Well, the Lord have mercy on ye, if your sins in the past bring more misery on them that survive you! 'As ye sow so shall you reap,' saith the Lord; and you have died a miserable, friendless death, just as you lived a miserable, friendless life. Ay! ay! ay! There's only one human being in the world to mourn you."

He looked up, and saw Edward Linne standing in the doorway, coldly regarding him. The two men looked at each other with no very amiable eyes.

"I take off my hat with all humility to the new laird," said Willie, with mock politeness.

Taking no notice whatever of the speech or the speaker, Linne came forward, and, standing on the other side of the bed, gazed for a few minutes at the corpse.

"If he led a strange life, he contracted questionable friendships," he muttered at last. "Well, his friends must be free of the Castle while he is here, I suppose, but after that they shall trouble it no more."

Turning on his heel, he left the room, and went straight to his own bedroom.

"Heavens! what a ghost I am!" he said, surveying himself in the glass. "One would think to look at me that the old fellow's death lay at my door. Well, I confess it has been a fatiguing job waiting for it; but now my penance is done, I can put off sackcloth and ashes and be myself again."

He made a hasty toilette, and de-

scended to the dining-room, where he found his dinner waiting. After he had finished his meal, he took his hat and left the house unseen by any one. Being somewhat late, he walked quickly. When he reached the place of meeting on the seashore, Mary was already there.

She was seated on the rocks, looking out upon the sea. The moment his eye fell upon her all his ill-humour returned, so that, when, with face aglow, she sprang up to meet him, he put her aside in anger.

"Don't play the fool!" he said. "I didn't come here for that."

"Edward, what is wrong?" she asked, amazed.

"What is wrong?" he answered, irritably. "Nothing is wrong—that is, nothing more than usual. But that is the way you women always go on if a man isn't eternally making a fool of himself. You begin to cry, and ask if anything is the matter. Well, now, the question is, what am I to do about *you?*"

The girl did not answer. She could not; sobs choked her throat, and her eyes were full of tears.

"I wish to heaven you had remained where you were," he continued, "and found me out at a more convenient time! But here you are, and something must be done, I suppose. One thing is certain; you can't hang about the neighbourhood; and we can't continue to meet, or people will begin to talk. They always do talk in these confounded places."

"Maybe we'll no' hae to wait lang," said the girl. "They say the laird is sair spent."

"The laird? he is *dead!*"

"Dead!"

"Yes; he died a few hours ago."

"Then you—you are the laird's heir?"

"I don't know. Yes, I suppose so," answered Linne, with a scowl.

"But you ken weel it's true, Edward. You—you are his only kith and kin; all the world kens that."

"And what everybody knows must be true, I suppose. Well, yes; I dare say I am the laird o' Linne. And what then?"

"And what then?" answered the girl, eagerly. "That is a' you bade me wait for. Hae ye forgot your words yes-

treen? It's ill wark to rejoice owre the death of the puir gentleman, but the Lord kens weel what I have suffered; and if I seem a bit glad, He will pardon me. Edward dear, speak kindly to me, noo that my time o' happiness has come!"

But he only scowled angrily.

"Mary," said he, "I want to speak to you seriously. Will you listen to me?"

"Ay, I'll listen," she said, gently.

"Well, then, I must tell you—— I had better do it now; I would rather not have faced it, but since you are here there is no help for it. Well, then, the laird's death will make no difference to *you.* I cannot acknowledge you as my wife."

She stared at him blankly for a few moments; then she repeated his words.

"You canna acknowledge me as your wife!"

"No; it is impossible."

"But why? Tell me why?"

"For a very simple reason; you are not my wife at all!"

The words were spoken slowly and deliberately, and while he spoke them

he kept his eyes fixed upon the girl's face. The tender, tearful look passed away now, and the features hardened.

"You ken weel you are lying to me, Edward Linne!" she said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I assure you I speak the truth."

"Then, tell me this," answered the girl; "if I am no' your wife, hoo comes it that I hae my marriage lines?"

"It was a false marriage," returned Linne. "Your marriage lines are waste paper!" He continued: "I should not have proposed to marry you at all, only you were a little fool, and forced me to it. Then I made you promise to keep it secret, because I dreaded the truth becoming known. Well, I went away. Do you think, if you had been my wife, I should have left you year after year without a sign? No, I was too great a coward to tell you the truth; but I thought the truth would dawn upon you, and that I should be spared the pain of this confession."

"You're no' in earnest, Edward," persisted the girl. "Think of your words last night."

"I do think of them; but what of

that? I was a fool last night, and kept up the old farce because I hadn't the courage to tell you the truth. But I have thought it over since I knew that the farce could not be prolonged, and that since you had found me, I must face the facts and tell you how matters stood. But don't mistake me, Mary! I don't want to be unkind to you. Since your father is dead, you are not bound to Scotland; I will give you money to take you to America, and you can begin a new life."

She laughed aloud.

"Begin a new life!" she said; "that is sae easy, is it? You talk o' a new life, Edward Linne; but can you mend the auld one? Can you gie me back the past and heal the heart you have broken? A' the years of sorrow that I had, the ae thing that comforted and strengthened me was the knowledge that I was your wife, that I was an honest lass, and that, when the day came, I should be able to hold up my head amang the best. And noo you tell me that I am a sinful, wretched woman, and that my father did right when he drove me frae my hame. May God forgive

you, Edward Linne! may God forgive you for the lee!"

She turned away, covered her face with both her hands, and sobbed piteously. He waited until her grief became more subdued; then he said—

"Of course it's hard to lose the position you have always looked upon as your own, but it shall be made easy to you. I don't wish to be ungenerous; I will supply you with money, and, as I said, you can go away."

"I dinna want your money," she said, rising and turning away.

"What are you going to do?"

"Dinna ask me. Wait and see."

"Mary, Mary!" said Linne, "look the matter in the face like a sensible lass. Think over what I have said; and when you have made up your mind as to what it will be best for you to do, let me know, and I'll do what I can."

But without a word she turned and left him. As she went, he smiled nervously.

"She is the sort of woman who might commit suicide," he said. "Well, since she is homeless and friendless, it might be the very best thing she could do!"

CHAPTER XVI.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

No sooner had the figure of the girl disappeared up the heights leading from the seashore, than Edward Linne turned to proceed upon his way. As he did so he came face to face with a man—no other, indeed, than the young stranger from America.

With a scowl he was passing by, when the stranger, with insolent familiarity, laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Stop a bit!" he said. "I want a word or two with you."

Edward Linne looked at him in surprise. His bold, reckless bearing, his careless freedom of manner, were more strongly emphasized than ever.

"I have no time to stand talking. I am wanted at the Castle."

"You could spare time for a flirtation with that pretty lass. You can spare a few minutes longer for a friend."

The words relieved Linne's mind to some extent; for they seemed to betoken

that the speaker knew nothing of the interview which had just taken place.

"You are no friend of mine," he cried, impatiently. "I don't know you."

"Oh yes, you do," returned the other. "We have met before, and are likely to meet again, I reckon. I think I can be of service to you; for, unless my ears have greatly deceived me, you're in a devil of a fix."

"What do you mean?"

"Girl in the way. Another girl whom you like better waiting for you at the Castle."

"Damn you, you've been listening!" cried Linne, taken off his guard.

"Right you are," returned the other, laughing. "I always keep my eyes and ears wide open. I learned that out west. Come, you'd better square me. I want money, for between you and me, I'm down to my bottom dollar."

"Let me pass," cried Linne, pushing the other aside.

"All right!" cried the other, with a shrug of the shoulders. "If you won't talk, I'll go and have some conversation with *your wife*."

Furious with rage, Linne turned again and faced his tormentor.

"Who are you?" he asked between his set teeth.

"Name, Roberts—Hungry Jim, they used to call me out in Colorado. Ready to drink, play, or fight with any man. I'd be as valuable as a special Providence to any man who would make it worth my while."

"I see, a vagabond! But you have come to the wrong shop if you want assistance."

"Now, don't you be a darn'd fool!" replied the young man, good-humouredly. "I know all the ropes of the ship you're sailing. The old man is dead, and you're in for the succession. Well! that looks like fine weather. But there's a storm ahead, and if you don't look out, it'll sink you to the bottom. Yes, sirree!"

By this time Linne had recovered his self-possession. He looked the speaker from head to foot thoughtfully, as he said—

"I am not to be intimidated. Whatever you know it cannot be of much consequence to me. If you listened to that girl's talk, you listened to the talk of a fool."

"Guess most women are fools. What about the other?"

"What other?"

"The young lady they call Miss Marjorie. By the by, has the old man left her anything in his will?"

"His will!" repeated Linne, nervously. "How do you know there is any will?"

"Certain to be. He was just the sort to make all tight and square."

"You are an impudent rogue," said Linne. "You talk very glibly of things you know nothing about."

"Think so?" queried Roberts, as he called himself. "Well, I guess you're right. I'm as impudent as brass, and as bold as hell. That's the sort of man I am, and the sort of man you want."

"Pshaw! I am a fool to listen to you!" cried Linne, turning as if to go.

"You'd be a most eternal fool *not* to listen," was the retort. "Come, which is it to be? Peace, or war? Mother's milk, or bowie knives? I'm not particular which!"

"What is it you want me to do?" inquired Linne, with a nervous scowl.

"Treat me square. I want employment. Find some for me, and pay me

for it. I don't ask much, and I'm ready for any job, from carrying off a girl to cutting a throat. I've done mostly everything in my time."

Had Edward Linne been a man of more than average penetration, or a very acute physiognomist, he would have perceived that between the bold, reckless manner of the man and his handsome, open countenance; between his almost savage speech and a certain tone of refinement in his voice, there was a contradiction very hard to reconcile. Superficially he seemed, both in manner and in dress, the sort of reckless blackguard of whom Linne had read in popular mining stories. Examined more closely, he had a face thoughtful and even gentle; blue, kindly eyes, which looked all the bluer by contrast with his freckled, sunburnt skin, a high, thoughtful brow, lips without a touch of coarseness—an appearance, in fact, contrasting curiously with his coarse dress and braggadocio demeanour. But Linne was no physiognomist, and his knowledge of character was very superficial. He saw only a coarse, mercenary blackmailer, ready to be the tool of any man

who would help him with money; a fellow who, by nature and by experience, was well fitted for any reckless deed.

"Humph! I might make use of you somehow," he muttered. "Where are you staying?"

"I'm just loafing about till I get a job," was the reply.

"I'll think it over," said Linne, turning on his heel. "In the mean time——"

"In the mean time, governor, I'm mum. Don't you be afraid. Whoever pals on with Hungry Jim will find him square. Now, suppose you ratify this little arrangement by handing me over a one pound note. Come, that won't break you now you're the heir of Linne."

Thus urged, Linne took from his pocket several crumpled notes, selected one, and handed it to his new acquaintance.

"If I want you, which is not likely, where can I find you?"

Roberts squared his shoulders and showed his white teeth merrily.

"Don't you fret about that," he replied. "I'm like the universal air, I am, and all round the man who puts me on the

job. Old Nick himself isn't more likely than I am to be at your elbow, whenever you whistle for me."

"All right," said Linne, with a nod and a scowl. "I'll think it over."

This time he did not turn again, but walked rapidly away. Roberts stood watching him with a curious smile. Then, in a moment, his whole manner changed, his face grew sad and clouded, and, seating himself on a rock, he bent forward with his face between his hands. Presently he seemed to remember something, and drawing forth the note which he had received, and which he had thrust carelessly into his waistcoat pocket, he rolled it up into a small ball between finger and thumb, and threw it contemptuously away. Then, leaning forward as before, he seemed plunged in gloomy meditation.

At last he rose with a sigh, and ascended the cliff, following the path taken by Mary. When he reached the summit, he saw her standing at some distance, looking down a deep chasm between the crags. The moment she saw him she drew back, and moved rapidly away. He immediately ran

after her, and, being swift as a deer upon his feet, speedily reached her side.

She turned and looked at him, and he saw that her face was pale as death.

"Why dae you follow me?" she said.

With just a touch of his old swaggering manner, he replied—

"Because I guess you're in some kind of trouble. Come, my lass, this won't do! I saw you looking over the cliffs yonder, and I know what you were thinking. Shall I tell you?"

She shrank away with a shudder, and put up her hands as if to hide her face.

"Ah, I see you know! Now, just you listen to me, Mary. Mary's your name, I reckon? You can't mend a bad tear by making it wider, and you can't cure the heartache by taking a jump into kingdom come. If I'd an enemy who wanted to get rid of *me*, darn me if I wouldn't live on to spite him!"

"I dinna ken what you mean," murmured the girl, trembling violently.

"Don't say that, Mary—I'm going to call you Mary, you see, just like an old friend—for you know well enough.

You're low in spirits, and I'd like to cheer you up."

"Nae man can do that," she replied, sadly. "You seem a kindly lad, but you canna guess what trouble I hae to thole, and, if you could guess, you couldna mend it. Na, na, only one man can do that!"

"You mean the heir of Linne? Well, *I'll* talk to him!" said Roberts, with a smile.

They walked on side by side. Again and again the girl glanced into his face, as if troubled and terrified.

"Is it true the old laird is dead?" she said at last.

"Quite true. He passed away this afternoon."

"And Edward—I mean Mr. Edward Linne—is heir to the estate?"

"That is not quite so certain," replied Roberts, carelessly. "There may be a will—indeed, I suspect there is—and in that case our friend Edward, as you call him, may be disinherited, cut off without a solitary dollar."

"Then what he said was true," said Mary, "and I was wrong to mistrust him."

"Have you been long acquainted?"

She did not reply, but hastened on. At last, as he continued to walk by her side, she paused and said—

"What way will ye follow and torment me? I wish nae company."

"Tell me where you are going?"

"Back to the gudewife at the cottage. I'll bide there the night, and the morn's morn, maybe, I'll gang awa'."

"Promise me one thing—to let me try to help you if you are in any further trouble."

"Weel, I'll promise that," she answered; "but nae man can help me noo."

He stood still, and suffered her to go. She passed wearily across the hillside, pausing once or twice to look back before she disappeared.

"The old story, as I suspected!" muttered Roberts to himself. "How queerly things repeat themselves in this miserable sham of a world."

CHAPTER XVII.

ASHES TO ASHES.

On a wild, windy January morning, when thick flakes of snow were beginning to fall, John Mossknow, laird of Linne, was carried to his grave. It was a shabby, yet a striking, funeral. There was the hearse, a somewhat ramshackle conveyance, and two mourning coaches, in one of which Edward Linne sat in state, while the other was occupied by Marjorie and two neighbouring landowners, old acquaintances of the deceased. For, despite all remonstrances, Marjorie insisted on following her guardian to the grave.

Though these were the chief mourners, a large procession followed on foot, and among them, bareheaded and wild, was Willie Macgillvray. Farmers from the neighbouring hills, peasants and crofters, men and women, had gathered to pay the last tribute of respect to one who, with all his faults, was the honoured representative of an ancient line. As the funeral *cortège* moved slowly down

towards the lodge gate, and onward towards the skirts of the seaside town, it was recruited by many stragglers of all ages; and when it reached the burial-ground, a bleak spot on the open hillside near the sea, the place was already thronged with townsfolk, sailors and fishermen, men and boys. Looking out on the throng of life, Marjorie rejoiced that the world was willing to do her dead friend so much honour.

The snow fell thickly as they gathered round the open grave. Then, when the ceremony was over, and the coffin was lowered to its last resting-place, Marjorie saw, close to her, the young man from America, standing bareheaded and looking down. Their eyes met, and his were full of deep sympathy and pity. At that moment, Edward Linne, looking pale and ghastly in his deep mourning, touched her on the arm.

"Come, Marjorie!" he said. "All is over."

But she only gave a great sob, and did not move. The earth rocked under her, and she seemed fainting, when she felt herself supported by a strong arm, while a voice said—

"The young lady is ill. This is no place for her!"

Recovering herself, she recognized the young stranger. She looked at him gratefully through her tears.

"Come, come," said Edward Linne, impatiently, pushing the other aside, "let us get home."

For a moment Roberts seemed inclined to resent the interference, but, conquering himself, he drew back with a shrug of the shoulders. Just then there was a movement of the crowd around the grave, a low murmur of voices, and Willie Macgillvray, his grey hair blowing in the wind, appeared at the head of the grave. Some attempt was made to prevent him from speaking, but he would not be silenced, and he began the following harangue:—

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name o' the Lord! Ashes to ashes, dust to dust; the hard heart is like a piece o' sandstone crushed under the heel, and the hard een gang out like glowworms in the dark. Men o' Linne, he that sleeps here was a man like yourselves, born unto sin and tribulation; a sad man, for he was childless;

a weary man, for he had lived long and lonely in the world. I have sat at his board, poor as I stand here, for he wasna proud; he knew the messenger o' truth, though he came in ragged duds to warn him. I have broken bread with him, I have talked with him as brother unto brother, and this I will say of him—that tho' he had sins upon his head, he knew them to be sins, and he repented."

Willie paused, and the people, a little shocked at his oration, began to move from the grave. Edward Linne, as he turned away, said in a loud voice—

"Silence the old fool! It is an outrage!"

But Willie, without turning his eyes on the speaker, continued rapidly—

"Who calls his elder fool, is a fool for his pains! The old erne dies, and the young corby crow would inherit; but the wise man smiles when he sees the crow in the eagle's nest. Have ye forgotten, men o' Linne, what the old song says?

'The bonnie heir, the weel-faur'd heir,
The wearifu' heir o' Linne,
Lonely he stands at his father's gate,
And nobody bids him come in!'

Fain, fain would I see such another, fair and comely, honest and leal, stand at the gates o' Castle Linne this day, while the interloper shrank in his shoon, and the bells o' the kirk rang welcome, welcome!"

He was proceeding in this strain when Roberts, pushing his way through the crowd, seized him by the arm. He was about to shake off the interfering hand, when he turned and recognized the American, who said something to him in a low voice, and drew him rapidly away — a proceeding which Edward Linne witnessed with no little satisfaction.

Marjorie and Linne returned to the Castle in the chief mourning coach, the other two mourners returning on foot to the town. As they drove along through the thickly falling snow, Marjorie leant back sobbing bitterly, while Linne, full of a new exultation, looked with flushed face out of the carriage window.

How sad and lonely looked the Castle, in poor Marjorie's eyes, as they returned up the snow-clad avenue! The moment they alighted, she passed up to her

room; while Linne, pausing in the lobby, accosted the old serving-man—

"Look here, Donald! Serve me up some dinner in an hour. Miss Marjorie will dine with me, I expect. I suppose there is no wine to be had, eh?"

"The laird was teetotal, sir, as you know, and his orders were——"

"Be good enough not to talk to me about that," cried Linne, lighting a cigar. "My uncle is dead; it is not now a question of him, but of me. Send down to the town and order half a dozen bottles of good sherry. *I'm* not a teetotaler, remember!"

He walked into the dining-room, and found the blinds drawn down and the room dim and cheerless, with no fire on the hearth. He rang, and ordered a fire to be lit at once. Then, throwing himself into an arm-chair, he soliloquized—

"I suppose I must keep up appearances for a day or two. Thank God, it is all over! My only anxiety now is to know if there is a will. I have written to Menzies, and he will be over in the morning."

Menzies was the name of the laird's solicitor, who resided in Glasgow. As yet he had made no sign.

Within the hour, the old servant announced that dinner was ready to be served.

"Lay the cloth here," said Linne, "and then call Miss Marjorie."

The cloth was duly laid and all prepared. Then Donald, after a visit upstairs, returned and said that Miss Marjorie did not care to come down, as she had a headache.

"Tell her I must see her, on most important business."

"But Miss Marjorie said——"

"Deliver my message, confound you! You are too fond of talking. Do as I bid you!"

The old man bowed and retired. After an interval, the door opened and Marjorie appeared, her eyes red with weeping, her face pale and very sad.

"You wished to see me," she said.

"Yes, of course. In the first place, I want you to sit down and take some dinner."

"I cannot eat," was the reply.

Nevertheless, as he persisted, she sat down with him; and now, for the first time, Edward Linne ostentatiously took the head of the table, gave his orders

like the master of the house, and grumbled not a little at the homely fare. Marjorie scarcely noticed the change, she was so full of sorrow. Pressed by her companion, she just put the food to her lips, but her tears choked her, and she could not swallow one morsel.

The repast over, Linne said—

"Do you mind my smoking?"

She shook her head sadly, and, almost without waiting for the sign, the young man lit his cigar and proceeded to smoke with an air of great enjoyment.

"I'm sorry there is no wine to offer you," he said, airily. "My uncle was far too temperate, to my fancy. However, we will mend all that. And now, Marjorie, I want to talk to you about yourself."

She looked up wearily.

"Yes, sir," she replied.

"Pray don't call me 'sir;' it sounds so formal. I suppose we shall continue friends? You see, Marjorie, I'm rather in a difficulty, so far as you are concerned. If my uncle has left no will, as I presume, the entire estate—such as it is —goes to me as heir. Now, I don't

quite understand your position in the matter."

"My position?"

"I suppose now, between ourselves, you are in no way related to my uncle? Don't be afraid to tell me the truth."

"I have told it you already. I am just an orphan, and neither kith nor kin."

"I thought perhaps—you won't be angry?—that you might, after all, turn out to be his daughter."

"His daughter?" she repeated, in astonishment. "But the laird was never married."

"No, of course not; but—ah—you know what I mean? Don't think me impertinent; I have no vulgar prejudices. You might still be his daughter, though he never actually married."

Marjorie flushed scarlet, and rose from her chair.

"There, there, forgive me!" he cried. "I see I was wrong. But if things are as I say—I mean, if there is no will—what will you do?"

"I do not know," said Marjorie, sobbing. "Of course I cannot bide here."

"Certainly you can. My own affairs

will, no doubt, take me a good deal away, but, remember, this is still your home."

He said this grandiloquently, and really felt as if he were behaving with noble generosity. A few minutes afterwards, finding Marjorie little disposed to carry the conversation further, he suffered her to retire.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WILL.

NEXT morning, on rising late, he was informed that Mr. Menzies from Glasgow had arrived, and was waiting for him below. Descending, he found him in the dining-room—a little, shrewd, fox-faced man of sixty, with very decided manners and a sharp, querulous voice. This was Mr. Menzies; but he was not alone. Standing by his side was Willie Macgillvray.

On seeing the Preacher, Linne started in astonishment.

"What brings *you* here?" he said, sharply. "We had enough of this folly when my uncle was alive, but now——"

"This person came with me, sir," said the lawyer. "My last instructions were to read the will in his presence."

"The will? What will?" cried Linne, startled.

"The will of John Mossknow, laird of Linne, drawn up by me, and witnessed in my presence, in this very room, on the twenty-seventh of last October."

"My uncle said nothing of any will!" cried Linne, almost angrily. "It seems very extraordinary."

Here Willie the Preacher put in his word—

"Possess your soul in patience, young man, till Mr. Menzies explains everything. I told ye once before—the cock may craw too soon!"

The lawyer, with a dry cough, sat down at the table, put on his spectacles, and drew out his papers.

"Oblige me, sir," he said, "by calling the household together. It is essential that every one should be present, including, of course, the young lady whom the late laird adopted."

Fuming with impatience, not unqualified with alarm, Linne rang the bell, and

gave his orders. Presently Marjorie entered the room, and took a seat by the window. Then came the old servant Donald, and his wife, who did the housekeeping, and the company was complete.

"This is the last will and testament of John Mossknow, laird of Linne," said Menzies, producing a document. "I break the seal in your presence."

Having done so, he proceeded to read in a low, monotonous voice. Divested of its legal phraseology, the will was to the effect that John Mossknow, being at the time of sound mind, unmarried, and without direct legitimate issue, had made disposition of the landed estates and moneys in his possession as follows: Firstly, to his nearest heir male, Edward Linne, his nephew, he bequeathed the sum of one thousand pounds sterling and the freehold estate of Linne, consisting of five hundred acres and the tenements thereon, including the Castle, subject to all the mortgages and burdens thereon, specified in a schedule; to his faithful servant, Donald Sutherland, and to Mysie his wife, a sum of fifty pounds annually, payable by the aforesaid Edward Linne; to his friend, the Rev.

William Macgillvray, the sum of five hundred pounds; to his adopted daughter, Marjorie Fleming, for her sole use and enjoyment, all the rest of his possessions, including the moneys lying at the bank or out at interest, the estates of Muckle Barnmore, Lesser Barnmore, Eskdale, and Farnacleugh, all contiguous to Linne, with all the farms and pasturage thereon.

Scarcely had the lawyer read thus far, when Edward Linne sprang to his feet.

"There is some mistake," he cried; "perhaps I should rather say a conspiracy! My uncle——"

"Be good enough to let me finish, sir," said the lawyer.

"But if this will means anything, it means that I am practically disinherited. What is Linne itself but a barren piece of moorland, with scarcely rent-roll enough, after the mortgage money is paid, to keep the Castle in tenancy?"

"That is just possible," returned Menzies, with a smile; "but you will oblige me by listening to the end. There are conditions."

"Well, go on!" cried Linne, impatiently.

"The bulk of your uncle's estate lies in the lands bequeathed to this young lady. The moneys bequeathed her amount in hard cash to fifteen thousand pounds, or thereabouts. But the testator goes on to say: 'It is my last wish and injunction that the aforesaid Marjorie Fleming, to whom I hereby bequeath the lands and moneys above specified, should marry the aforesaid Edward Linne. I express this wish and injunction, but make it in no way binding upon her, should she see any just legal or other impediment; yet, since I know her to be dutiful and loving, I believe that my wish will be her law, and that, by fulfilling the latter, she will keep the estates together, and preserve the direct line of the lairdship of Linne.'"

Edward Linne glanced at Marjorie. She sat pale and stupefied, as if scarcely realizing the meaning of what she heard; but the laird's own words—"What say you, Marjorie, to Edward Linne for a husband?"—were ringing wildly in her ears. She remembered, too, how eagerly he had spoken of the marriage, how anxious he had been that

the name and heritage of Linne should be preserved through further generations.

"When was this will made and witnessed?" demanded Edward Linne.

"As I have told you, sir, on the twenty-fifth of last October," replied the lawyer. "But I have not finished. I have here a codicil, added as late as the fifth of last December."

He paused, glanced round, coughed, and read as follows:—

"I, John Mossknow, laird of Linne, being still of sound mind, but feeling my end drawing near, have nothing to add to the will drawn up and signed by me in October last, and delivered in the presence of my solicitor, Andrew Menzies, and the requisite witnesses, save one thing only, which is at once a codicil and a confession. Twenty-eight years ago, I had a child by one Elizabeth Campbell, a peasant girl, living with her father on my estates. I promised marriage to the said Elizabeth Campbell, who looked upon me as her lawful husband; and inasmuch as we lived together several nights and days as man and wife, before witnesses, she was my lawful wife, and her son was my

lawful son. Yet out of the hardness of my heart and the sinfulness of my disposition, I denied her and rejected her, causing her to sail with her child to Canada. The ship on which she sailed was lost at sea, and I believe every soul on board perished. Nevertheless, since the ways of God are inscrutable, and even the seas have before now given up their dead, I make proviso in this codicil that if, by any miracle of chance or divine dispensation, my son, Robert Campbell, child of the aforesaid Elizabeth, should be living, he is, without question of legitimacy, to be acknowledged as my sole and lawful heir, the inheritor of my name and all my lands, reserving only to my nephew, Edward Linne, the sum of one thousand pounds, to my foster-child, Marjorie Fleming, an annuity of three hundred pounds, to be paid quarterly out of the estates, and to my old and faithful servant, Donald Sutherland, and his wife the annuity already specified in my will. I add this codicil with neither hope nor dream that my son, Robert Campbell, survives, but partly to ease my conscience of its heavy burden, and partly to justify the poor

woman who, I hereby again acknowledge, was my wife in the sight of God."

The lawyer paused, folded up the document, and laid it on the table. Marjorie was sobbing bitterly; why, she could scarcely tell. Willie the Preacher sat bolt upright in his chair, gazing with a curious expression of triumph and dislike at Edward Linne, whose agitation knew no bounds. Then, at a sign from the lawyer, the old couple left the room.

"I have fulfilled my duty," said the lawyer. "Mr. Mossknow's wishes are, I believe, quite clear. Putting aside the remote possibility of the survival of his direct issue, he has left the bulk of his property to the young lady, with an injunction that she should unite her fortunes to *you*, sir, who inherit the patrimonial castle and titular estate."

"I was right," cried Linne, pacing up and down the room. "My uncle was a madman! Whoever heard of such a tissue of absurdities?"

"There was method in his madness," interposed Willie the Preacher. "He knew weel what he was doing. Weel, Marjorie," he added, "you have heard

the will read. Is this young slip to be your husband?"

But Marjorie only sobbed—

"Oh, do not speak to me! I want nothing. I'll take no money. Let Mr. Linne take everything—it is his own."

"Remember the laird's wish, my doo," persisted Willie, still with his eyes fixed on Linne.

"Enough of this!" cried the young man. "You shall not torture the young lady. If this will is a legal document, which I doubt——"

"It is legal, sir," said Menzies. "Nothing now can set it aside."

"It was delivered by a lunatic! Had my uncle been a sane man, he would never have consorted with such associates as this man, who is as mad as he!"

Curiously enough, Willie preserved his temper, and smiled as if amused.

"Say you this o' *me*, young man?" he demanded. "O' one who is a gentleman by birth, and a B.D. o' the University of Glasgow? Marjorie, my lass, what say *you?*"

Still sobbing, Marjorie took his outstretched hand and kissed it.

"Oh, Mr. Macgillvray, you were my

guardian's only friend! He loved you and respected you, and I—I love you too!"

"Hear ye that, Edward Linne?" said Willie, gently patting Marjorie's shoulder. "Here's one, at least, who doesna think that B.D. stands for 'damned blackguard'! For all that, I ken weel, and Mr. Menzies here kens, that I have been a disgrace to my cloth, and an ill-conditioned vagabond!"

The lawyer gave a short laugh, and replied—

"You shall not trap me into any libellous statement, Mr. Macgillvray. It is enough for me to know that my late client had your entire confidence. He was eccentric, certainly, but as sane as I am at this moment."

His business done, Mr. Menzies took his departure, accompanied by the preacher as far as the lodge gate. Left alone with Marjorie, Edward Linne looked steadily at her for some moments, and then said gently—

"Of course you will remain here, *now?*"

With tearful eyes, she looked up into his face.

"Oh, Mr. Linne, I hope you do not think me to blame. Indeed, indeed, I did not know!"

"I am sure of that," he answered. "Pray do not think I envy you your good fortune. No, indeed—I congratulate you!"

She looked so pretty, so winsome, in her perplexity and sorrow, that he added to himself—

"Come, it might have been worse! I shall have the estates, after all, and Marjorie into the bargain!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MARJORIE'S DILEMMA.

THUS it was that the grey-hair'd witch Fortune shook her box, and by a dexterous turn of the hand turned everything topsy-turvy. It was rather confusing at first, since Linne, who had so easily assumed the airs of a grand seigneur, found it somewhat difficult to lay them aside; while Marjorie, who had always regarded herself as a nobody, felt appalled at the greatness which had

suddenly fallen upon her. She was utterly amazed, and for the first twenty-four hours she obeyed the instincts of her nature, and remained locked in her own room and upon her knees.

But if the chief actors in the drama found it difficult to decide as to the right and wrong of the case, the public soon made up their minds. It was the one act of the laird's life which called forth general approbation; the one thing which succeeded in sending him to his grave applauded by one and all. Everybody loved Marjorie; everybody looked with distrust and dislike upon the interloper, who had come, as they averred, to rob her of her just due. Consequently, when it became known that the interloper had been dethroned, and that Marjorie held her fate in her own hands, the joy was great and general. During the day the news was talked over with delight by many a fireside, and when night set in bonfires blazed at many a cross-road.

From the window of her room Marjorie saw these demonstrations, and felt more pain than pleasure. It seemed like exulting over the fallen, she thought

to herself, and that was utterly foreign to a nature like hers. Even when she remembered the scene which had taken place in the Castle the moment the truth became known, when she recalled the bitter accusations which Linne had made against everybody concerned, she felt no great resentment towards him, ever alleging as his excuse the bitterness of his disappointment at the change. The blame, if blame there were, must, according to Marjorie's idea, fall upon those who had led him to look upon these things as his own. It was like crowning a king and then dethroning him; yet everybody seemed unreasonable enough to expect the disappointed monarch to rejoice.

While Marjorie was busy pondering abovestairs, Edward Linne was equally busy pondering below. Although he had managed by a strenuous effort to curb his temper, and make it appear to all concerned that he was, after all, about to accept the inevitable with a good grace, he had no intention of letting the matter rest until he had assured himself that all was hopeless.

It was a case of sink or swim with

him. For many years past he had been living upon the chance of this inheritance, and now that the old man's end had really come, the time had arrived when he must face his responsibilities, if he could not dispose of them. True, there was still one chance left if he chose to take advantage of it; but the very thought of this was appalling. The old man had expressed a strong dying wish that the two young people should marry, and Linne believed that Marjorie could be easily induced to fulfil her guardian's behest. And if she did, what would be the result? He could satisfy his creditors, certainly; but he might succeed, if the evidence of the other girl ever came to light, in preparing for himself a prominent position before a criminal court in Scotland. He shrank from the punishment, not the crime, and in the mean time set himself to work to think of some other way out of the difficulty.

Presently a bright idea struck him. There might be another will! The old laird was quite eccentric enough to have made another, and hidden it in some mysterious corner of the Castle. With

this idea in his head, Linne set himself to work to search every corner of the house. However, his search was in vain.

"It is no use," he said at last, with a sigh; "the only thing I can do is to make myself agreeable to Marjorie."

The other clause in the will, which left the property to some unknown individual whom the laird called his son, he never once took into consideration; and in this matter he believed that Marjorie would entirely agree with him.

Having failed, then, in his endeavour to find any scrap of paper which would enable him to disinherit Marjorie, he decided that the next best thing for him to do was to make himself as agreeable to her as possible.

Since the reading of the will, she had kept herself aloof, and he had been left alone. On the second day, however, when old Donald announced to him that his breakfast was served, and he went into the dining-room and found that he was to breakfast again alone, he sent a message to Marjorie, hoping that she would come down. In obedience to the request she came.

She looked very winsome in her plain

black dress; but her manner was subdued and strange. When she gave him her hand, it trembled slightly, and she scarcely raised her eyes to his face. Breakfast being over, and the two left alone, Linne referred to the will.

"I am so sorry, sir," murmured Marjorie.

"Why are you sorry?" said Linne.

"Well, sir, it was not what you expected," continued the girl, "and it looks like taking everything from you."

Linne paused a moment; then said—

"You can't rob a man of what doesn't belong to him. Of course, if my uncle had done nothing for you, the duty would have fallen upon me; so I am very glad it is as it is, Marjorie. But you mustn't treat me as if I were your enemy; I hope it won't interfere with our friendship. Promise me it shall not."

"Indeed, I'll promise that. Why should it?"

"There is no reason why it should; indeed, there is every reason why it should *not*. *He* wished us to be friends, didn't he?"

At this direct reference to the dead

man and to the conditions of the will, Marjorie sighed heavily, and turned away her head.

"He was always a good friend to you, wasn't he, Marjorie?"

"The only one I ever had," replied the girl, furtively wiping away the tears which came to her eyes.

"Doesn't that make it easier to try and do what would please him were he alive?"

"Oh, please let me go!" said Marjorie, rising hastily, her cheeks aflame again.

But Linne blocked the door.

"I won't let you go till you promise not to avoid me," he said. "I am a stranger here, you know, and have no one but you."

She gave the promise, and he allowed her to pass.

During this interview no direct mention had been made of the second clause in the will; nevertheless, Marjorie thought of it a great deal, and a couple of days later she set out over the moor towards Willie Macgillvray's cave. She wanted to discuss this matter, which was becoming all-absorbing to her, and

she felt it would be worse than useless to discuss it with Linne. For, despite the young gentleman's extreme friendliness to herself, she felt a certain distrust of him, and was convinced that he would not be interested in the finding of one who on his appearance must inevitably step in as the heir of Linne.

But, above all things, Marjorie loved justice, and she felt that since so little justice had been done to the boy during his childhood, he should, if he survived, receive a full measure now. Besides, in what better way could she serve the laird than by fulfilling his dearest wish? And she knew that that wish was that his son, if he lived, should have his own.

Of her own loss in such a contingency she thought nothing; indeed, she did not regard it as a loss, since, instead of regarding herself as an heiress in her own right, she believed that she was merely holding the property in trust for the rightful heir. In any case, she herself would be sacrificed, since, if the heir could not be found, she would feel herself bound to carry out her guardian's last wish, and marry his nephew.

So, that morning, when the girl left

the Castle and set out across the hills towards the hermit's cave, she felt anything but a blithe and gladsome heiress. The grief of the last few days had saddened her, and she thought everything looked sorrowful—the hills brooding together beneath a lowering sky, and the utter stillness of the calm grey sea; but when she had proceeded some distance, the fresh, cold air brought a colour to her cheeks, and raised her drooping spirits. As her spirits revived, new hopes arose; so that when she reached the cave she felt more like her old self again.

The door of the cave was partly open; but as she came along the rugged path, which, as Willie often remarked, "led to his front door," she could not see inside.

"He must be in," she said to herself, "and deep in his books, poor man. Well, it is good sometimes to disturb him; he reads o'er-much."

Approaching on tiptoe, she gave a gentle tap at the door, and put in her head.

"Are you there, Mr. Macgillvray?" she said. "I have come to talk to you."

She suddenly paused and drew back.

The cave was, indeed, tenanted; but the man who sat there was not Willie Macgillvray, but the stranger who had interviewed the laird on the very day of his death.

CHAPTER XX.

CONFIDENCES.

He was sitting on a stool quietly reading. At sight of the girl, he rose, looking rather astonished, and put his book aside.

"Don't let me frighten you away," he said, with a smile. "Pray come in."

But Marjorie remained where she was.

"I thought to find Mr. Macgillvray," she said.

"Well, I guess he will be here directly; I am waiting for him too."

There was an awkward pause; then he said—

"Don't you think you would like to come in?"

"No, thank you," returned Marjorie.

"Then I suppose I shall have to come out," said he. "Guess it looks rather inhospitable to stay by the fire

while a young lady of property remains out in the cold. You are my visitor, you know, since I happen to be keeping house for our eccentric friend, the hermit."

"Don't disturb yourself," said Marjorie; "I won't wait."

"You had better wait now that you have come. If you object to my company, I will go."

But this Marjorie would not allow. She had no right, she answered, to intrude upon him, still less to drive him away. So she decided to remain; and since by remaining outside she compelled him to do the same, she entered the cave, and took a stool by the fire. But she purposely avoided looking at her companion, and only spoke when she was compelled to answer him. He soon noticed this reticence.

"Excuse me, young lady; but I reckon I have managed in some way either to pain or annoy you."

She raised her head, and for the first time looked him in the face. As she did so, tears sprang to her eyes.

"What's the matter, eh?" he said, brusquely.

"Do you not know?" she answered. "You persuaded me to let you see the laird. After you went into the room, he grew worse; and he never spoke again."

"I see! I see!" said the young man, gloomily. "And you regard me as the cause of this? You need not answer. I know what you want to say. But let me assure you you are wrong. I did not hasten the old man's end; he had got his billet when I arrived. I gave him a message which should have brought him comfort, even at his death-bed; and perhaps it did, who knows?"

Marjorie did not answer. She looked at him quietly from beneath the broad brim of her hat. Presently she said—

"You come from America, sir?"

"Thereabouts. From Canada and the wild west. I have spent most of my life there, I guess."

"And you knew people there who knew the laird?"

"Yes," he replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"Did you ever meet one Robert Campbell?"

"Guess I met a good many of that name—the Campbells—out there."

"Yes; but did you ever meet one who knew the laird, who had been in Scotland, who——"

"Whereabouts does he live?" broke in the stranger; "and what is he like?"

Marjorie shook her head.

"I don't even think that he is alive. I have never seen him, and I have been told again and again that he is dead."

"Then, why on earth are you so interested in him?"

"I will tell you, sir. You have heard about the laird's will?"

"Well, yes; I've heard he made you an heiress instead of making our amiable friend an heir."

"Ah! but that is not all. He has left the money and land to me on two conditions; and one is, that should this Robert Campbell be alive and ever found, he is to become the heir of Linne."

"And rob you of all your possessions, eh, except a flea-bite, a mere pittance compared to what you have now? Let us put it plainly. If the young heir happened to be alive—which is very improbable, you know, if the story they tell of the shipwreck is true—and comes forward to claim his own, you are left

without a shilling. Well, I don't think you need worry yourself. Even if he is alive, and knocking about the prairies, ten to one he'll never hear about this; so you're safe."

"Safe!" echoed Marjorie.

"Safe and square. Keep as quiet as you can about it; don't make confidants all round, and the news of the young scamp's good fortune may never reach him, even if he lives!"

Marjorie looked at him in astonishment; then she rose.

"I don't think I need tell you any more," she said. "I thought, maybe, since you had travelled in America and knew the world, you would be able to help me."

"Stop a bit!" he cried, as she was moving towards the door of the cave. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to find Robert Campbell, if he is living, and tell him of his father's will."

"Come, come, missie!"

"And if he is living in any corner of the earth, I will find him. Even if I spend half my fortune in searching for him, there will still be the other half for him when he is found."

"Do you mean to tell me that you *want* the young heir to be found?"

"Oh, sir, of course I do!"

"Give me your hand, missie," said the stranger, holding forth both of his. "I've met a good many specimens of the human race in my time, but I never met one like you. Why, you're a heroine," he continued, patting her little hands with his broad brown one, and looking admiringly into her pale face. "I do believe you'd be right down glad to give up the property to this stranger."

"Indeed, I would, sir," returned Marjorie. "The laird was always thinking about him, and always longing to do what was right; but death came o'ersoon, and—and——"

"And you were left to complete the work which he left unfinished. Well, how do you mean to set about it?"

"I don't know," returned Marjorie. "I am so ignorant of the ways of the world. What do you think I should do?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, now, it's rather hard to answer that question offhand. It's kind of awkward to hunt about the world after

a shadow. But since you have confided in me, I'll think the matter over, and see if I can help you. That is, if you'll promise not to worry about it, but to let it rest with me."

She gave the promise, and the conversation took another turn.

"Have you ever been in Scotland before?" asked Marjorie.

"Yes; I was born in Scotland, and when I was a youngster my people emigrated. Now, I've got a cattle ranche in the wild west."

"Then you are going back?"

"Well, yes; I shall have to go back. And there isn't much to keep me here. I shall be sorry to leave my friend the hermit, though. He is a fine specimen of a nineteenth century recluse, and we have become friends."

"I suppose your relations are all in Canada?"

"Guess they would be, if I had any," he answered, with a smile. "I'm lonely there, as I am here, except for the cattle. But you," he said, as if eager to change the subject—"what will you do now? It's dull for a young lady like you, to live in a place such as this."

"I have always lived here," answered Marjorie, simply.

"Then, if you don't succeed in finding this same Robert Campbell, or his ghost, you will settle down and enjoy the property?"

Marjorie hesitated.

"There was another condition in the will," she began.

"So there was. Our friend the hermit has told me. But I thought it was only a *wish?*"

"It is just the same thing," returned Marjorie.

"Excuse me there; I think you are wrong. When a condition is imposed, it becomes necessary to carry it out; whereas a wish is obeyed if one finds it possible to do so. Am I right?"

"Yes, maybe."

"Possibly, though, you intend to carry out your guardian's wishes?"

"I should like to carry them out," returned Marjorie, without a trace of confusion in her tone.

"Ah! that is another matter," he replied, totally mistaking the meaning of her words. "Then, if you do carry them out, I for one hope you will be happy."

He took her hand and pressed it tenderly. As he did so, the figure of Willie Macgillvray appeared at the door of the cave. Marjorie ran to the old man's side.

"Is it you, Marjorie?" said the old man, clasping the hand which she held out to him, and looking curiously at the young man. "It does my heart good to see you out again, my bairn. And how are things going at Castle Hunger?"

"It's eerie there," returned Marjorie; "it will ever be eerie now, Mr. Macgillvray."

"And yon limmer lingers still?"

"Yes, indeed; he has more right there than I have. The Castle is his own."

"True, and it's more than enough for him. And so you've been making friends with Mr. Impudence here? Weel, you might have done worse; for though he has an impudent tongue, he's an honest sort o' laddie, and, when he's so minded, he talks like a book. I hope he's done the honours of my house weel, Marjorie?"

As the young man looked at Willie, his face was irradiated by a smile which made him seem strangely handsome.

"I have tried, Mr. Macgillvray," he

said; "but your cave here is like my ranche out west—more fitted for rough men than for a pretty missie like this young lady."

"Dinna speak lightly of my abode, young man," said Willie, indignantly. "It's a grand habitation!" Turning to Marjorie, he added, "He's an impudent loon, Marjorie; ye see that in his eye. But he kens something of the world; and I like his gleg, wild ways, and I have bade him welcome. But are ye going, Marjorie?"

"Yes," returned the girl; "you were so long in coming that now you have come I cannot wait."

"Are ye walking, or did Brawnet bring ye?"

"I walked."

"And you are thinking of going back alone? If I was a younger man, Marjorie, if I was the same as when I used to preach to the folk, and lecture the laird, and take a drop frae the bottle, I'd walk with ye to Castle Hunger. I was a wild carle in those days, my dear—ay, and reckless and de'il-may-care; but there was one that always made me cry shame on myself. He was

a wee bit laddie, with a roguish eye in his head. I mind more than once he stood up before me, the imp, and said, 'You are drunk again, Willie Macgillvray!' and I felt downright ashamed."

"Unpleasant memories ought to be buried, Mr. Macgillvray," interrupted the stranger, laughing.

"Weel, it brings me to what I was saying, young man. I am not so young as I was, but you're young enough. So be off wi' ye! Walk wi' this young lady to the Castle, and take good care of her."

The stranger, who seemed willing enough to obey this behest, picked up his hat on the instant; but Marjorie protested that she wanted no escort. Willie, however, who would take no denial, had the pleasure of seeing the two finally walk away together.

It was not altogether a comfortable walk; for, owing to some reason which neither could explain, the conversation between them was rather constrained. When they had gone two-thirds of the way, Marjorie paused, and hesitatingly extended her hand.

"I have to visit a cottage close by here," she said; "so I will say good-bye."

He took her hand.

"Can't I wait and see you safe home afterwards? Our pious friend is sure to cross-question me."

"I would rather you did not wait," she replied.

"Very well. But shan't we meet again? We must, you know. I will think over what you have said to me, and talk to you about it again."

"Very well," returned the girl. "Good-bye, sir."

"Good-bye," he said; and she walked away.

He watched her as she tripped across the heather. As he did so, a hand was laid upon his arm, and, turning sharply, he found himself face to face with Edward Linne.

* * * * *

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TWO MEN.

THE moment Marjorie had disappeared, Linne turned to Roberts with a scowl, and demanded—

"What were you doing with that

young lady? I saw you together in close conversation."

"Don't be alarmed, governor," returned the other, laughing. "We were only talking about trifles. I met her by accident, and as she was inclined to be confidential, I listened."

"What did she say to you?"

"Asked me about America and Canada, and whether I had ever come across one Robert Campbell. I told her I had known a dozen of that name."

"Humph! anything else?"

"Then she went on about this business of the will, and told me the old man had left you out in the cold—unless she took pity on you, and made you her husband."

"What! she said that!" exclaimed Linne, angrily.

"Something of the sort—not exactly in those words, but I gathered it from her pretty cackle. After all, governor, you're in luck's way. You've only got to jump through the church door, and you've got the loaves and fishes still."

"D—— your impudence!" cried Linne.

"Oh, d—— it, by all means, so long as you don't d—— *me!*"

"She must be mad, to confide in such a fellow as you!"

"Well, you see," said Roberts, dryly, "she ain't proud, like you; she comes out of the people, and it's only accident that has made her a lady. She's free-spoken with everybody, and doesn't judge a man by the coat he wears on his back. But I see you're in trouble, mate! Now's the time to call in Hungry Jim!"

"What do you mean, you scoundrel?" demanded Linne, fiercely.

"Don't get riled. You're clean stuck between what they call the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand is a rich young lady, ready and willing to marry you, just to be had for the asking. On the other hand, worse luck, is the girl you've married already!"

Linne grew livid.

"Married! You lie! I'm not married!" he cried. "If that woman says so——"

"She says it, and she stands to it, as you know, mate. Well, what then? Say the word, and I'll settle *her!*"

Linne drew back and looked at Roberts, who, with as ugly an expression as his fair face could assume, met his look with a savage wink.

"Settle her!" he murmured. "How?"

"You leave that to me. I haven't been raised out in the wild west for nothing. Just say the word, and I'll guarantee that she'll clear out, and leave the coast clear for you to marry."

"I'll have nothing to do with it," said Linne, trembling violently. "I tell you I have nothing to fear. I am a free man, and shall marry or not marry, just as I choose."

"I thought you had more pluck, mate," returned Roberts, with a grin. "I tell you straight, that girl means to be troublesome."

"What can she do?"

"Blow the gaff, as the thieves say. Even if what you say is true, and she isn't your wife, she can tell such a story as will put a powder barrel under your plans, and blow them and you right up into the air."

He paused and watched Edward Linne keenly. Linne shook like a leaf, and tried in vain to appear composed; then, with trembling hands, he drew out a cigar and attempted to light it in vain.

"Want a light, mate?" said Roberts, drawing out a match-box, and striking a

lucifer on his sleeve. "There you are. Why, you shake as if you'd got the ague."

After an effort Linne found his tongue.

"Perhaps I am a fool to trust you," he said. "If I admitted that this girl was a nuisance to me, how could you assist me?"

"In more ways than one. To begin with, this is a lonesome place; people have been drowned hereabouts, I'm told. Accidents happen every day."

Linne looked positively ghastly.

"You villain! Do you mean to say that you would commit murder?"

"Anything to oblige a pal," returned Roberts, coolly. "But that isn't the only way. The girl's tired of you, and might like a change. Suppose I could tip her the wink, and persuade her to leave the country in my company?"

"Can you do that?" cried Linne, eagerly.

"I'll undertake it for a hundred pound!"

"How should I know if you kept your word?"

"No cure, no pay. I'll get her out of

the way first, and then call on you for the money."

Linne reflected. He saw clearly that he was already in the man's power, insomuch as he knew his secret. He gathered, too, that the fellow was a common desperado, to whom a hundred pounds would be a fortune. The girl was desperate; might, and possibly would, make a scene at any moment; it would be a positive blessing, therefore, if Roberts could play the special providence as he proposed, and spirit her away. But if he agreed to the man's terms, one difficulty remained; he did not possess the sum demanded, and would be comparatively short of funds till the laird's affairs were legally settled.

"Do as you propose," he said, at last, "and I will agree to your terms. Only, you will have to wait a little time for the money."

"I'm willing to do that," replied Roberts; "that is, I'll wait till you collar the dollars. All I shall want will be your I O U for the money, payable when you realize."

"Very well; you undertake it?"

"Right away. Just you go home

quietly and make your mind quite easy. Leave all the rest to Hungry Jim!"

So they parted—Linne in no very tranquil state of mind, wending his way back to the Castle, while Roberts hastened to look after the girl. He was not a minute too soon in finding her; for, after a long search, he saw her standing on the very spot where he had seen her before, looking down into the great chasm between the cliffs. Her back was towards him, and he approached her unseen and unheard.

He was close upon her when she uttered a wild cry, and with uplifted arms seemed about to leap down to her death. Swift as thought he caught her and drew her back. Without turning her face to see who held her, she screamed and struggled; but he raised her bodily in his arms, and carried her from the cliff's edge; then, as he released her, she fell shuddering on the ground, weeping and moaning aloud.

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CHAPTER XXII.

WHISPERS OF A DARK DEED.

EDWARD LINNE returned to the Castle in no very amiable frame of mind. He was angry with the woman he had wronged, angry with the bold Canadian for finding out the secret, angry with himself for his stupidity in compromising his future for the sake of a mere country-girl, who had never had more than good looks to recommend her, and who had, to a certain extent, lost even those. Easy, however, is the descent to the shades; one black step taken, it generally leads to another. Having made up his mind to act the villain as regarded poor Mary, he had literally (as he thought) summoned up the Devil to assist him. Of course, it never entered into his calculations that Roberts was anything short of a thorough scoundrel—a vulgar bravo, ready to do any desperate deed if well paid for it. Had he not himself said so, in good set terms?

Still, Linne was uneasy. It would have been far better if he had had

nothing to do with such a desperado. Roberts, however, knew his secret; and he must either have accepted his offers of assistance, or made the man a dangerous enemy.

Little as he knew of Marjorie's character, Linne had seen enough to be certain that, if she knew the truth, she would be certain to side with his victim, and utterly refuse to marry her betrayer. Now, as far as he could yet see, a marriage with Marjorie was inevitable, unless he was to remain a poor man. And he had liked the girl, in his idle, selfish way, from the moment he first saw her. Of her beauty there was no question; nor of her goodness, though he did not care so much about that. She fascinated him somehow with her still, thoughtful ways, her tenderness for the dead, and her steady, unquestioning fidelity to his memory. He was piqued, moreover, that she did not seem overpowered with the splendour of his person or the elegance of his manners, but accepted him quite simply and coolly, as an every-day young man related to her guardian by blood.

However, he was determined to possess

both her and the money, and in order to do this, it was necessary to keep Mary out of the way.

In the mean time, he had taken care to make everything comfortable at the Castle. Donald and the old housekeeper remained, on sufferance as it were, but two trim country-girls were taken in as servant-maids, and a smart valet from Edinburgh came down to look after Linne's own person. The old cellar was filled with wine, ordered on credit; a smart horse and new dog-cart were got on the same terms; and, altogether, things looked, as Linne expressed it, more civilized. Save for Marjorie, the young man would have been off to London or Paris—the only places on earth, as he thought, fit for a gentleman's habitation. As it was, he tried to make the best of his dull life, drove about the country, called on neighbours, went over the moor now and then with his dogs, and consulted local experts about the prospects for salmon-fishing.

Several days passed after the interview recorded in our last chapter, and he was growing very uneasy, when one morning, as he stood smoking in the porch,

Roberts appeared, looking agitated and somewhat pale. His manner was furtive and anxious, and he beckoned Linne out before he spoke.

"It has been a tough job, mate," he said, "but I've succeeded!"

"What do you mean?" cried Linne.

"Speak low, speak low! I've done the job!"

Linne started, and grew quite ghastly.

"What! You don't mean to say——"

"I mean to say that you'll never be troubled again by the girl that called herself your wife."

"My God!" cried Linne, the beads of perspiration standing on his brow. "You haven't——" He broke short in the sentence, and added eagerly, "Remember, if there has been any foul play, it rests on your shoulders! I'll have nothing to do with it, or you! I wash my hands of the affair!"

"Wash them as much as you like," returned the other, savagely; "you'll never get them clean, I reckon. I've done as you bid me, and, by ——, you'll have to pay my price!"

Linne shrank back, for he was at heart a coward. The man seemed like a

wild beast, ready to spring on any one at the least provocation.

"What have you done?" he demanded, moistening his dry lips with his tongue.

"Never mind. All you wanted was to get rid of the girl. Well, she's disposed of. Now I want that hundred pound."

"Not one penny shall you have, till you give me an explanation. You talk as if you had murdered her! It's too horrible!"

Roberts gave an ugly smile.

"You didn't say that a day or two ago, when we made our bargain. You were eager enough then for me to dispose of her—yes, by thunder!"

"It is a falsehood!" cried Linne. "All I said was, that I wished her to be got out of the country."

"Isn't it the same thing? Suppose we put it in that way, mate. She's left the country, then! You're a free man—free to marry whom you please!"

Linne was stupefied with terror. He could not shake off the belief that a dark deed had been done, and already he seemed to hear the hue and cry after him

for complicity. He trembled like a leaf, and looked nervously on every side, as if expecting to see the emissaries of the law appear and arrest him on some hideous charge.

"Why, what a chicken-hearted chap you are!" said Roberts, contemptuously. "That's what always gets over me, mate. Such men as you think nothing of breaking a girl's heart, and driving her into her grave, so long as you don't see the shadow of Jack Ketch; what's more, you'd strangle a poor creature fast enough, if you could do it safely; but the moment you see danger ahead——"

"Hold your tongue, and leave this place!" cried Linne. "I'll not talk to such a scoundrel!"

"Take my advice, mate," returned Roberts, with a threatening look, "and don't rile Hungry Jim. I'm mild as mother's milk to those who treat me square, but I'm rattlesnake poison to the man that rounds on me, mind that! I've come for that hundred pound!"

"I told you I had not the money!"

"Never mind that. Your I O U will do me well enough, as I told you. I'll wait a bit for the cash."

"Suppose I refuse?"

Roberts laughed, showing his white teeth viciously.

"Then we'll see it out together. I'll go straight away to the police barracks and tell them what I've done, and who paid me to do it. I'm not at all particular. A man can die but once, as the saying is, and I shall be polished off in good company. Come, which is it to be?"

Roberts evidently knew his man. A few minutes later, Linne entered the Castle, and returned with the paper, which he handed over.

"How am I to know that you will keep this secret?" he asked, trembling violently.

"Now you've treated me square, I'll treat you square. Likely enough I shall be going away."

"Tell me, for God's sake—is Mary—is she—— You know what I mean! Speak!"

Roberts answered with a nod and a significant gesture.

"But she will be found! There will be an outcry! Everything will be discovered!"

"Leave that to me. We don't do things by halves out in the west. I'll tell you one thing—she's just as safe at the bottom of the sea as the laird's dead son—that little chap that was drowned—and I promise that she'll never rise to trouble you till *he* rises and does the same!"

He turned on his heel and walked away, leaving Linne, in a miserable, terrified condition, to creep into the house and fortify his nerves with a glass of strong spirits.

Jaunty and light-hearted, whistling to himself, Roberts strolled down the bleak avenue, and came out upon the open road. With his clear blue eyes and fair, sunburnt face, he did not look the least like a murderer, but held his head up high, looked frankly into every face he met, and, if spoken to, answered cheerily. His way lay past the hermit's cave, and as he approached the little clump of trees where it lay he saw Willie Macgillvray standing in the roadside.

Hastening his steps, and still whistling merrily, he met Willie face to face, and their eyes met.

"Weel, ye murdering villain," cried

Willie, "ye bloodthirsty descendant o' Cain, what news?"

"I have told him," answered Roberts, smiling.

"My conscience! And what did he say?"

"He was frightened out of his wits at first, and tried to make out that he had never given me any instructions. Then I talked to him. The man's a coward, I find. And at last he gave me this paper. 'I O U one hundred pounds.' He ought to have added, 'for value received in assassination.'"

Willie took the paper, and read it eagerly, first adjusting on his nose his horn-rimmed spectacles. Then he cried, with twinkling eyes—

"Take care, ye limmer! I'll turn queen's evidence! I'll come to the hanging o' the pair of ye!"

Then Willie laughed outright, making a peal of merriment, in which the young Canadian boldly joined.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AMONG THE MOUNTAINS.

SEVERAL weeks had passed away, when Edward Linne received a summons to go southward on business connected with the estate. He informed Marjorie of the fact one morning at breakfast. She had just returned from an early walk to the old burial-place where the laird was lying, and was unusually sad and thoughtful, so that she scarcely answered when he told her that he was going away.

"I'm afraid my departure won't trouble you much," he said, a little reproachfully. "Well, no doubt, I have been poor company. I think you, too, ought to have a change."

She only shook her head, replying—

"I want no change, Mr. Edward. When shall you return?"

"In a few days, I hope. But I wish you would not persist in calling me 'Mr. Edward;' it sounds so absurdly formal. Though I am not your blood relation, I feel as if our lives were closely bound

together, as, indeed, they should be, if my uncle's wishes have any weight with either of us."

Her face flushed slightly, but she met his gaze quite calmly. He continued, somewhat uneasily—

"And that reminds me, Marjorie, things cannot go on in this way for ever."

"Indeed, no."

"You know—I am sure you know—in what esteem I hold you. Up to the present, I have not liked to speak of it; but I think the time has come to be frank. The awkward part of the matter is that I can't be so without running the risk of being misunderstood. You remember the wish expressed in my uncle's will?"

"Yes," she answered, quietly. "I remember it well. I'm aye thinking of it."

"But seriously?"

"Yes, Mr. Edward. I was thinking of it this morning as I stood at the laird's grave."

He rose, and bent over her. She did not shrink away, but looked up at him with frank, honest eyes. The colour

in her cheek deepened a little, that was all.

"Well, I have thought it all over too. If you were a penniless lass, my task would be easy enough."

"How's that, sir?"

"Why, then, without fear of misconstruction, I would say, 'Marjorie, I love you—I wish you to be my wife.'"

He took her hand gently. She still kept her eyes upon him, and did not draw the hand away. Her steady gaze made him uncomfortable, and, as she was quite silent, he continued—

"Have you nothing to say, Marjorie? Cannot we manage somehow to understand each other? You know I love you, do you not?"

"How should I know that, Mr. Edward?" she answered. "You have never told me so."

"Then I tell you so now. From the first moment we met, your beauty fascinated me, and your goodness soon completed the conquest. Come, shall my uncle's injunction be fulfilled? Shall we join our fortunes together, and make this dull old place merry with an old-fashioned wedding?"

He bent closer, and would have kissed her, but she drew her face from his and repulsed him, without coquetry and without anger.

"You must give me time to think, Mr. Edward," she said. "I know my uncle wished me to marry you; I can never forget that. If it was not so, I would answer you now, as frankly as you have spoken."

"What would be your answer?"

"It would be this—I cannot marry you, because I do not love you; and because—yes, because I am sure you do not love *me*."

"How can you say that?" cried Linne, with a gesture of protestation. "I swear to you——"

"I think you like me, Mr. Edward, and I think you mean kindly. But love is different. What pains me most is that I should have the money and the lands which are rightly yours. But I do not wish to keep them. They are yours, not mine; and I shall never be happy till you take them back."

"But what can be done? Surely, unless you hate me too much, marriage would be best."

"I do not hate you, and I wish I could do the laird's will. Give me time to think it over; give me till you return home."

So it was settled, and in the afternoon Edward Linne departed from the Castle, carrying away with him the impression that Marjorie was a simpleton, and could easily be persuaded to become his wife. This, however, was to some extent a miscalculation. The girl, though ignorant of the world, had shrewdness enough to perceive that Linne's affection for her was a very doubtful quantity. She esteemed him because he was her guardian's nephew; indeed, her one thought in the matter was the dead laird. Grateful, dutiful, and affectionate, she was eager in all respects to fulfil her beloved friend's behests, in all matters save the one. Her conscience troubled her; for she felt that in hesitating to marry Linne, she might be grievously offending the *manes* of John Mossknow.

To the question of worldly position she was supremely indifferent. She had never had money, and never desired money, and she had not yet realized the idea that she possessed any. It seemed

a very simple arrangement for her to hand over everything to the heir, as she eagerly desired to do; but then she hesitated, lest by so doing she should offend the dead man in not carrying out the spirit and the letter of his will. Sorely troubled, she sought advice at the fountain of her guardian's inspiration—Willie Macgillvray. Curiously enough, the old man laughed at her, and refused to advise her either one way or the other. Since the laird's death, or rather since the scene at the funeral, Willie had undergone an extraordinary change. He seemed years younger, at least in spirits; his old good humour had returned to him; and so amiable had he grown that, whenever he encountered Edward Linne, he ceased all offensive manifestations. So when, after Linne had gone away, Marjorie begged him to help her, Willie only patted her on the shoulder, and said—

"A lass must dree her own weird, as the fools say in the Highlands. Marry the young limmer? Why not, Marjorie?"

"It was the laird's wish!"

"Dying men wish strange things. He did not make it a condition."

"I wish to do what is right," she cried. "You are a good man, Mr. Macgillvray. Will you not guide me?"

"Be guided by your own heart, Marjorie. If ye love the limmer, marry him!"

"But I do not love him!"

Willie smiled pawkily. His enjoyment of the girl's perplexity was immense.

"Then keep the siller," he said, "and let the heir whistle for another wife."

"I will never do that," she cried, indignantly. "I will never keep what is not rightly my own."

Finding no counsel in the hermit, and a little angry, indeed, at what she deemed his foolishness, Marjorie again puzzled her own little brain how to act. The days passed, and she had come to no determination. Mounted on Brawnet, who was now the most honoured and over-fed beast in the stable, she took long rides over the estate, or wandered on foot by the seashore, and pondered over the problem which was puzzling her. No change whatever was made in her dress or in her demeanour. Though Mr. Menzies had sent her a draft for a considerable sum on the local bank, and had asked her for further instructions,

the draft lay neglected in her bedroom, and she had not replied to the letter. Yet at every point she was reminded of her changed position. The country folk saluted her as a great lady, and when she went into the town to make any simple purchases, the tradespeople were almost servile.

Do what she might, she could not shake away the conviction that her guardian's will was constructed solely with a view to her marriage with his nephew. Why, otherwise, had he left the titular estates, a barren stretch of land, to Edward Linne, while making him comparatively a beggar unless he married her? Surely, surely, the laird would have been grievously offended if he had thought his dying wish was to be disregarded. She remembered, too, his own words, when they spoke together of such a marriage; and how, despite all his distrust of his nephew, he had insisted on the necessity of his inheriting, that the land might not go out of the family.

Several miles distant among the hills to the eastward, that is to say, inland from the sea, was a lonely mountain loch, and on its side a solitary shepherd's

cottage. It had been a favourite spot with Marjorie in summer, when the cuckoo was telling his name to all the hills, and the water-lilies were opening in the shallows, with oiled leaves and alabaster cups. Thither she rode one morning on Brawnet, eager for solitude. The air was clear, though cold, and the faint chill breath of the coming spring could already be felt in the air.

The way she followed was a bridle-path, or scarcely a path at all, strewn with loose stones and boulders, precipitous, and even dangerous, if Brawnet had not been mountain-bred and as sure-footed as a goat. Brawnet took his time. When a tuft of grass or bunch of dry bracken caught his fancy, he stopped and nibbled at it till he was satisfied. When he was tired, he paused, looking round sometimes at the pretty figure seated on his back, and blinking sleepily on her. Clad in a plain stuff gown, with a common straw hat upon her head, Marjorie looked much more like a peasant girl than like an heiress and the lady of the land.

She reached the lake side at last, and found all still as death—the water calm

and black, the heather-clad hills rising on every side, the heaven above grey and dim. Nature here kept an eternal sabbath. Save for the one tiny shepherd's cottage on the hillside, there was no sign of human habitation.

Dismounting, she left Brawnet to his own devices—his first proceeding being to seek out a soft, grassy spot, and roll over on his back, saddle and all. Marjorie laughed and shook her little riding-whip at him, but, regardless of all remonstrance, and indifferent to all dignity, he continued his awkward gambols. Then, when he had finished, he rose, shook himself, neighed, and began to graze carelessly, picking out the succulent morsels.

Leaving him to his devices, Marjorie walked along the lake side in the direction of the cottage. She had not gone far when she saw descending the hillside the figure of a man. He came eagerly towards her, with flushed cheek and sparkling eyes, and she recognized Roberts, the young Canadian.

"This is a surprise," he cried, taking off his hat. "What brings you so far from home?"

"I often come here in summer time," she replied; "and I thought I would like to come over now. I rode over on Brawnet."

"I'm glad to see you, anyhow," said Roberts, looking at her in admiration. "The mountain has brought the colour to your cheeks, missie, and you look as pretty as a picture."

Despite his assumption of a rough manner, there was something curiously gentle in his tone. For the first time it struck her that he was very handsome. Tall, erect, and strong, with his hat set boldly on his brows, and a staff in his hand, he looked like some young Greek shepherd, in the times when such shepherds drew their descent from gods.

"All well?" he asked, walking by her side. "No news, I reckon?"

She shook her head.

"Why have *you* come here?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm a kind of Wandering Jew, and am found everywhere. I like quiet places like this. I like to be alone with the great Spirit that made the mountains and the sea."

She looked at him in surprise. His

tone, his very accent, seemed changed; there was not a trace of his old rough manner.

"I am used to solitude," he continued; "but there where I live, the prairies stretch round us like the ocean. Watch them when the wind blows, and you would think they were great blue billows rolling. You may gallop for days, and see nothing else but waves and waves of moving emerald grass. That sort of thing makes a man feel small."

"You have lived there all your life?"

"Ever since I was a boy. Did I ever tell you I was Scotch by birth?"

"Yes, you told me that."

"Mountain-bred, you see. I had an old teacher, a sort of schoolmaster, who first taught me to think about religion. I should amuse you if I quoted some of his sayings; but they sank into me, and many a time they kept me straight when I was going crooked. Do you know, Miss Marjorie, there are folk in this world who think that no God made it, and that it came by chance?"

"They must be very foolish," she answered; "or, maybe, just mad folk."

"Mad with their own conceit—idiots

that think to sail the great ocean of life without a compass. To think that a man can stand up before yon sky, and see the stars coming and going like ships of fire, and say that there is no God!"

She looked at him in deepening surprise. His face was bright with reverent thoughts, his voice full of resonant vibrations. He no longer talked like a common and comparatively uneducated man, and not a vestige of the backwoodsman remained. She thought him very strange. Seeing her intent and wondering look, he laughed merrily.

"You think I'm qualifying for a preacher," he said; "but whenever I come into such places as this, and think of the mean souls that are to be found in the world, I feel I could almost rival Willie Macgillvray, and set up for prophet by profession. I'll prophesy one or two things right off, if you will let me."

She answered his smile, and he proceeded—

"You'll never find the rightful heir of Linne, unless I help you!"

"But you have promised."

"Of course I have. Well, that's

prophecy number one—see if it comes true. Prophecy number two is—you'll never marry a worldling like Mr. Edward Linne."

"How do you know that?" she asked, blushing.

"Why? Because I won't let you—there!"

His bright eyes were fixed on hers, and her face grew quite hot beneath the gaze.

"How can you prevent me?" she said, laughing.

"I don't quite know, but I shall try my best. Do you care for this fellow?"

"I like him very much," she replied. "He is my guardian's nephew."

"Has he reminded you yet of the condition in his uncle's will?" asked Roberts, eagerly.

"We have spoken about it," said Marjorie, simply.

"You'll never marry him, I prophesy again."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because when you marry you'll marry for love, like the birds—and that reminds me, doves don't mate with daws, Miss Marjorie."

"You talk very strangely," said Marjorie. "Sometimes you speak like a common man, uneducated and almost rude; sometimes you speak as if you were a gentleman."

"Well, I'm not that," returned Roberts; "I'm only a poor man. If I were rich now—ah, if I were rich!"

"What would you do?"

He paused and looked her full in the face in fearless but respectful admiration. Despite her habitual composure, she blushed like a rose under his gaze, and turned away her eyes.

"Ask me rather what I would say!"

"Well, what would you say?"

"This: I have wandered up and down the world for many years, but I have seen only one woman with the heart of an angel and the eyes of a dove; and if that woman won't have me, I'll die a bachelor and give all my money to the poor."

As he spoke, he took her hand. Agitated and a little afraid, she repulsed him, saying—

"I do not understand."

"May I make myself clear? Well,

then, here before God, under the open sky, I swear that I love *you*, and will never love any other woman!"

And he swept off his hat, and stood with face uplifted, like one making a solemn asseveration. Marjorie was simply stupefied. Such a frank and sudden assault robbed her of all her self-possession. She could not even utter one word of rebuke.

"Now I've offended you," cried Roberts, gently. "Well, I've spoken my mind, for the first time and the last. I know I'm only a poor, common fellow; I know I might as well ask for the sun yonder, as for the love of a great lady like you."

"I am not a great lady," faltered Marjorie; "but you should not talk to me as you have done."

"I know I should not. Blame my rough breeding; blame the solitude and the mountains, which drag a man's heart out in spite of himself. But I have spoken God's truth, Marjorie."

"I scarcely know you, sir," said the girl; "you are almost a stranger."

"Have you ever seen two ships from the same land, after voyaging for weeks

asunder, meet suddenly at sea? No, you have not. Well, when first we met, our meeting was like that. We had both led lonely lives—you in yonder castle, with only the old man to watch over you; I out in the west, with the rolling prairies on every side. I was like a rough trading craft, rudely put together; you were like a white-sail'd pleasure yacht, trim and bonnie and newly launch'd. Well, when you ran up your flag, I knew you were a friend; but when we came nearer, and we exchanged greetings, I struck my flag for ever—to the queen I had been seeking since first I left the shore."

If Roberts was not a duly qualified lover, he was certainly an audacious one; yet his freedom was not offensive, and his candour was very far removed from disrespect. What woman does not appreciate the courage of a lover who, overleaping all barriers, attempts to win by one bold *coup?* Marjorie was a little alarmed, but not offended. It was the first time that any living man had spoken to her in such a strain. How different, she thought, from the calm, almost cold-blooded profession of attach-

ment advanced by Edward Linne? Yet she felt that she must put an end to the affair at once. The man's boldness warranted similar frankness on her part; so she nerved herself to put an end to the interview.

"I should be very foolish," she said, "if I thought you spoke in earnest. Maybe, I misjudge you, but in Scotland here we do not talk of such things at all. In Canada, maybe, it is different. But you must promise me that, if we meet, you will never talk so again."

"I have promised already. Pardon my folly. I only wished you to know the truth. From this moment I am dumb—unless you bid me speak."

"Love-making and such folly are not for me," said Marjorie. "If I marry, it will be to fulfil the laird's wish; but I have no time for foolishness or foolish talk."

"You think love foolish?" cried Roberts. "By heaven, it is the one wise thing in a foolish world—the one divine thing in a world of wickedness—the one spark that shall fly upwards when all the world is turned to dust and ashes!"

"Good-bye, sir," said Marjorie, holding out her hand. "Please do not stay."

"Your wish is my law," he answered. "If you were to bid me take a leap from yon crag into the lake, and so end my life, I'd do it."

"You would kill yourself?"

"For a wave of your little hand. When I swear allegiance, I swear it body and soul. I see you think me mad. I never was saner in my life. But remember my prophecy. Come weal, come woe, you'll never marry Edward Linne."

He seized her hand and pressed it to his lips; then he ran up the hillside and disappeared.

Much perplexed and troubled, Marjorie turned back to the spot where Brawnet was awaiting her. On the way back home, she meditated so much that Brawnet had infinite leisure to linger and amuse himself as he pleased.

"I ought to be very angry," she thought to herself. But, curiously enough, despite all her surprise and agitation, she was not really angry at all.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MARJORIE'S NEW FRIEND.

AFTER the calm came storm. When Marjorie awakened in the morning, she heard the wind whistling angrily in from the sea, and felt the old castle shake to its very foundations.

She lay for a while listening to the sound, thinking of the many occasions during her childhood when she had lain there quaking with fear while the storm raged angrily without. Then she slipped from her bed, drew aside the window-curtains, and looked out. The prospect was desolate, indeed; a second winter seemed to have set in, for snow was falling heavily.

But if the prospect without was dreary, the old castle could be made cosy enough within. When Marjorie descended to the dining-room, she found a fire blazing half up the chimney, a table holding the breakfast things standing close by, and near to the table, Donald respectfully awaiting her commands.

"Breakfast is ready and piping hot in

the kitchen, Miss Marjorie," said the old man, when the girl appeared.

"All right; bring it in, Donald," said Marjorie, smiling, as she went over to the fire, and extended her hands to the blaze.

The old man opened his eyes as he looked at her. When he reached the kitchen, he said to his wife—

"Eh, woman! Miss Marjorie is hersel' again, for her face is just shining like the summer sun!"

And the old man was right. When Marjorie had finished her breakfast and was comfortably seated in an easy-chair before the sitting-room fire, she caught the reflection of her face in the glass, and started with wonder at herself. Never before had she seen such a light in her eyes, such a smile about her lips. In a few short hours she had blossomed into another being, because, forsooth, her spirit had been startled by the May-music of love. Yes, the tune was begun, and the dance of life was beginning, although she herself was not aware of the fact. When on the previous day she had listened to the young man's audacious confession, she had done so

almost without a blush, certainly without confusion. She had been stunned, as it were, by the novelty of the thing, and then before she had had time to recover herself he had left her. Yet those few words had awakened the spirit which had been slumbering within her, and now it suddenly awoke.

At first she wondered why the young man's bold words had not angered her; now she ceased to think at all, but sat before the fire in a kind of trance, looking into his face. Yes; for there it was, bright and bonnie, gazing at her from the flame of the brightly blazing fire. After a long study of it, Marjorie turned to the window, and looked out over the barren moor.

"I am not sorry the storm has come," she said. "I must bide in the house."

For the whole day the storm continued, and during that time Marjorie never once left the Castle. There had been times—and not so very far back either—when during such weather she would have wrapped herself in an ulster, buttoned on thick boots, and braved both wind and snow; but now she kept

to the house, wandering like a restless spirit from room to room, or sat dreaming by the fire. Not that she feared the storm; but she dreaded to go forth, lest by some unlucky accident she might be brought face to face with the stranger, whom she felt now quite ashamed to meet.

But much as she might try to fly from her fate, it pursued her. On the third day, when the wind had died down and snow had ceased to fall, the young man came boldly up, and knocked at the Castle door.

Marjorie saw him coming; for she was standing at the dining-room window. When he came up the snowclad avenue, he saw her, and took off his hat. At sight of him, a chilly, nervous feeling, which she believed to be anger, took possession of her; but she did not move, and the next moment the door of the dining-room opened and the young man was ushered in.

He came forward with his old frank smile, and held forth his hand. When Marjorie gave him hers, it trembled, and was very cold.

"My personality is effaced for the

time being," he said; "I am Mr. Macgillvray's messenger."

"Did *he* send you?"

"He did. At the same time, I was very glad to come. I wanted to see you."

She withdrew her hand coldly, and he continued—

"Don't freeze up; I am not going to tread on forbidden ground; that is to say, I won't wander over it too much. When I left you the other day, I promised not to open up one subject of conversation again. Well, I want to refer to it just once more, and then I've done. May I?"

"What do you want to say?"

"Only this. I want to ask you to forget what I said that day, or, if you can't do that, just think of it as the ravings of a madman. Guess I wasn't quite myself that day. I had been dreaming among the hills when you came upon me, and I said things that I shouldn't have said if I had been in my natural state of mind. Men are queer cattle, and sometimes, when nature takes hold of them, I guess they do queer things. Well, nature had taken hold of me that day, and made me a fool."

Marjorie did not answer. True, if she had been asked to decide the kind of speech which the young fellow should have made to her, it would have been couched in much the same terms; yet now that it came it did not bring her very much satisfaction.

"I want you to look upon me just as you look upon our old friend the Hermit," continued the young fellow. "To let me help you through with the work you've got to do, and carry your friendship with me right away back to the States."

"Are you going away?" said Marjorie.

"Well, yes; but I want you to be friends with me while I am here. Will you?"

"Yes, of course," returned the girl. "I hope we *are* friends!"

"Well, that's all settled; and now for Mr. Macgillvray's message. He is very much concerned about you, and wants to know how you got on during the storm?"

"I got on very well," returned Marjorie, laughing. "What did he think could happen to me?"

"Don't know; perhaps he thought the Castle might come down. It's old enough, isn't it?"

"It is very old, and it shakes a good deal when the wind blows; but it's quite safe."

"I suppose you have been shut up in it the last few days?"

"Yes."

"And didn't you find it dull?"

"No; I like to be alone."

"It seems to agree with you, at any rate. I can tell Mr. Macgillvray *that*."

But he did not seem in a great hurry to get back to the cave. He lingered for fully an hour, when, at last, he went away.

This visit was only a prelude to many others. For some unaccountable reason, Willie the Hermit became strangely uneasy about Marjorie's health; and as Roberts seemed to be the only messenger he could employ, the young man was seen to wend his way almost daily to Castle Linne. Indeed, so regular had his visits become, that Marjorie had grown to look for them, and spent a very restless day indeed when the Canadian failed to appear. Constant intercourse cemented their friendship;

and instead of bidding him sit sedately in the room like an ordinary visitor, Marjorie would show him over the Castle, or, taking him to the library, give him free access to the few books left by the laird. He seemed strangely interested in all this, and at times, too, he would manifest no little emotion when Marjorie talked of the departed. When the girl spoke of her dead friend, there was such infinite tenderness in her voice that it almost made the young fellow feel sympathetic towards him too. At any rate, it was pleasant to listen to Marjorie, no matter of what she was talking; and these daily visits to the Castle soon became the one thing that to the Canadian made life worth living.

The forbidden subject had never again been broached, but Roberts thought of it night and day. Perhaps, too, it was the memory of that walk by the lake side which made these visits so pleasant to Marjorie.

So the time sped on, until one day Marjorie, who had taken no account of the flight of days, was startled from her new-found happiness. A letter came from Edward Linne, announcing his

speedy return, and expressing a hope that Marjorie would be glad to see him. Startled and pained, Marjorie suddenly remembered the relative positions of herself and Linne, and felt like a criminal.

She was truly on the horns of a dilemma, and she was resolved to carry her troubles straight to the only man in whom she dared to confide. The moment breakfast was over, therefore, she ordered Brawnet to be saddled, and mounting on his back, she rode straight to Willie Macgillvray's cave. She found the old man at home, and he gave her a cordial welcome. He saw at once that something was the matter.

"Is there anything wrong, Marjorie?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing *wrong;* but I had a letter this morning, saying that Mr. Edward is coming back."

"Weel, don't fash your head about that, lassie. It's the limmer's home."

"I'm not troubling about it, but about myself, Mr. Macgillvray."

"Yourself, my doo?"

"Yes; for I know what he will do when he returns. He will want me to carry out my guardian's wish."

"And marry him?"

"Yes," said Marjorie, with a sigh.

"Weel, it's easy to do."

"It is not so easy," said Marjorie, trembling. "I don't think I can marry Mr. Edward."

"Then leave the carle alone; that's easier still."

But Marjorie shook her head.

"That is not easy either," she said; and Willie laughed, and replied that women seemed to be ever crying for the moon, though they didn't want it.

Presently Marjorie went back to the Castle to think it over again, and to try if her own brain could not devise some means of getting out of the dilemma. Since Willie Macgillvray would not help her, she had no one; for it was utterly impossible for her to discuss this subject with the younger man. So she puzzled her brains day and night. At last she hit upon a plan which she believed would give general satisfaction.

Delighted with her idea, she resolved to communicate it at once to her friend the Hermit. It was wonderful what satisfaction the newly discovered plan gave her. She hurriedly threw on her

hat and cloak, and prepared to set out. As she opened the door, she found herself face to face with Roberts, who stood outside, and who was just about to knock.

He seemed astonished to see her; he was still more astonished at the state of the hall. All the furniture was piled here and there about it, as if for a "flitting."

"Why, what is the matter?" he said.

"Mr. Edward is coming home."

"Oh, that's it, is it? And when is his lordship expected?"

"On Saturday," was tne reply.

"On which date I suppose my visits here must cease. Well, all pleasures must cease some time, Miss Marjorie; but I shan't lose sight of you altogether, that is some comfort. Where are you going now?"

"To Mr. Macgillvray. I have something very important to say to him."

"Shall I walk there with you, and leave you to the tender mercies of the old man, or would you rather go alone?"

Marjorie smiled quite frankly, and replied—

"No; I do not wish to go alone."

Having thus obtained permission to accompany her, he walked along by her side.

CHAPTER XXV.

WILLIE PLAYS SIR ORACLE.

On arriving at the cave, they found Willie eating his breakfast—a cup of oatmeal mixed with the clear water of the mountain burn.

He nodded kindly as Marjorie entered the cave, and the young man, after gaining permission to come back for her, strolled off along the shore.

"You find the lad useful, Marjorie?" said the old man, who continued to eat his breakfast, and watched the girl slyly out of the corner of his eye.

"He is very kind," returned the girl, quietly.

"And you like him weel, eh, Marjorie?"

"How could I be off that, Mr. Macgillvray, since he is so good to me? But I do not understand him. He is very strange."

"Strange? How's that?"

"Sometimes he talks like a rough, common man, at others like a gentleman."

"Weel, weel," returned Willie, laughing; "the latter way is the true one, Marjorie; he is a gentleman at heart; But he has led a wild, devil-may-care kind o' life in the States, and it has roughened him a wee."

"Then he talks so uncannily!"

"Weel, he has had an odd kind of education, and his ideas are a bit unsophisticated. But he's none the warse of that. He's a good kind of lad, and he wouldna make a lassie a bad husband!"

Marjorie bent low over the fire and pushed together the peat sods with her little foot. When she lifted her head again, her cheeks were quite red.

"Mr. Macgillvray," she said, "I want to talk to you again about what I said the other day. I know now what I can do, and I have quite determined to do it."

"Ay, and then?"

"When the laird said in his will that he wished me to marry Mr. Edward, he did not mean exactly that."

"Then it was a pity he took the trouble to write it," returned the old man, with a smile.

"I mean," continued the girl, "he was not really anxious for me to *marry* Mr. Edward. He wanted to do two things, and yet he could not do them both. He wanted, most of all, to keep the property together, and let it be owned by one of his name."

"And if he had been a weel-loving and a God-fearing man, he could have done it, Marjorie. It was his wicked pride and his vicious heart that caused all his trouble, and no one but himself was to blame."

"Do not speak of that," said Marjorie. "It was very sad and terrible; but for all his misdeeds he was cruelly punished. But remember, Mr. Macgillvray, he could have kept his property in the hands of one of his own name if he had not thought of *me*. He could not bear to leave me penniless, so he thought, 'I will make her a rich lady; then, if I wish it, she will marry my nephew. The property will be kept together, and they will both be satisfied.' Don't you think I am right?"

"Maybe; but you haven't married him!"

"No."

"And you mean to?"

She shook her head.

"The laird, if he had lived, would have been too kind to force me against my inclination. I cannot marry Mr. Edward, because I do not love him; indeed, I do not wish to be married at all; but I can carry out the laird's wishes just the same as if I did."

The old man opened his eyes.

"Then you're a witch, Marjorie. How are ye to do it?"

"By just giving all the property to Mr. Edward."

"By letting Mr. Edward, as you call him, make you a beggar!" cried Willie. "Very well; but you have forgotten one thing: suppose you happen to be giving away other people's goods! Suppose the rightful heir, the other poor de'il of a Campbell, should come forward!"

"There's no chance of that," said Marjorie, with a sigh. "I used to dream of it, Mr. Macgillvray; but I know he is dead, and will never come forward to claim the land."

"What makes you so certain?"

"Everybody knows it. Mr. Roberts says so too."

"He says so, does he? Then you may be sure if *he* says so, he's right, Marjorie. But in case o' difficulty?"

"Of course," continued the girl, "I should make it a condition that if he came he would receive his own."

The old man smiled.

"Weel, Marjorie, and when do you mean to make this known to Mr. Edward, as you call him?"

"As soon as he comes back. And now I must return, Mr. Macgillvray. I am having the Castle cleaned out and made nice for him, that it may please him, and then I will give all to him and go away."

From that moment until the much-looked-for Saturday arrived, Marjorie was in a state of much trepidation and delight—delight at the bright, cosy look of the Castle, the rooms of which grew wonderfully pretty beneath her magic touch; trepidation at the thought of what she had to communicate to Edward Linne. It was not a pleasant task which she had set herself—to tell him that the

idea of marriage with him was so distasteful to her that she could not reconcile herself to it, much as she would have loved to carry out her guardian's wish; yet since she had resolved to do this, she set about it in the pleasantest way possible. Her first task had been to make the Castle bright, her next to assume brightness for herself; and so happily did she succeed in this that when, on Linne's arrival, he found her standing at the door to give him welcome, his heart leaped up with joy at the glowing look on her face.

He himself looked jaded and weary. Dunned on every hand for claims which he could not yet meet, and oppressed by the remembrance of the coldness with which the girl had received his advances, he had looked forward to troublesome times. But now all his fears seemed groundless, for there was Marjorie evidently of another frame of mind since his departure, and ready and willing to extend to him a helping hand.

His spirits revived considerably during dinner, and when it was over and he found himself alone with the girl, he took heart of grace to begin.

"Do you know, Marjorie," he began, "I am very glad to get back again to Linne Castle and to *you?*"

"I am glad you like what I have done," said the girl, nervously.

"Ah yes," he said, looking about him, "now I come to look around, I see you have been busy. Tell me, Marjorie," he added, taking her hand, "have you been lonely? Have you missed me at all?"

Marjorie quietly withdrew her hand, and her heart began to beat with apprehension, for she felt that the time had come.

"I am sometimes sad, but never lonely at Linne Castle," she said.

"Then I hope you have not been very dismal," said Linne, making no attempt to take her hand again. "But, Marjorie, you know what I would say—you remember what I said to you before I went away? Have you thought of it?"

"Yes," answered the girl.

She tried to say more, but her mouth dried up and the words refused to come.

"And you have decided? Is not that so, Marjorie? You have decided, like a sensible girl, to dispense with unnecessary delay, and get our marriage over? There

is no use in waiting. *He* would not have wished it; and I am sure you are too good to oppose his dying wish."

To his amazement, Marjorie covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. When her sobs had subsided she looked up at him.

"Indeed, I cannot do all that he wished. I cannot," she said; "I have thought of it ever since you have been away, and I know I can never marry you."

She was horrified at the look of anger which crossed Linne's face.

"So!" he said, between his teeth, "you have thought it over and come to that decision, have you? And I suppose you expect me to accept that as final."

"I am sure," returned Marjorie, "you would not wish to marry one who did not love you."

He laughed outright.

"A fine excuse! a nice way out of the difficulty! You get possession of my property, and then you keep it with a paltry excuse like that. No, no, it won't do; a condition was imposed upon you, and you will keep it."

"I will never marry you, if that is

what you mean," said Marjorie, firmly. "I thought I would not before, and now I am sure I will not; but I do not wish to keep you from the money. I do not want it; it is yours."

"What do you mean?" said Linne, aghast.

"I mean what I say, Mr. Edward. I am sure the laird wished his nearest heir to have the money and the land; and, since I cannot marry you, I will give up everything just the same."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Linne, "that you won't marry me, but will give me all your property?"

"It is your property, not mine," said Marjorie. "He intended it for you."

"Marjorie," said Linne, "you don't talk like a sensible woman. You must know I could not accept this, even if I would. The whole thing is preposterous."

"I do not see that."

"Then you are blind and foolish. Of course, theatrically speaking, you are right; the property *is* mine. I have been taught to regard it as mine for years, and when it was taken from me I was tricked; so you are right in one

way. I have no right to suffer such a heavy loss simply because you don't know your own mind."

"But I do know it," returned Marjorie. "I have resolved to do this, and I will do it. The property is yours, as I said, and you shall have it."

"And you—what will you do?"

"I do not know. I have not thought of that."

"Of course not. You have wild flights of fancy, and you act like a child. It's all very well to play the romantic heroine in novels and plays, but in real life it doesn't do. It's so easy to say 'I will restore to you your own,' but it's not so easy to do it."

"It is very easily returned," said Marjorie. "I shall be no worse off than I was before. I am not fit to be an heiress, and I do not wish to be."

"That's all very well, but you must live. Have you any relations?"

"No."

"That's awkward," he said, "because you might have gone to them. Oh, it's too ridiculous! Why on earth can't you marry me? It is the simplest way out of the difficulty, after all."

But it did not seem so to Marjorie, who persisted in shaking her head, and Linne saw in her eyes a certain amount of determination which he would never be able to overcome. She would give him all her property, but she would not give him herself; if he would not accept one without the other, he must lose both.

"Very well," said Linne, at last. "I am too tired to discuss this matter further to-night. I will think it over, and let you know in the morning."

So they parted.

Left alone in his room, Linne cursed the very name of the girl who, he averred, had brought all this trouble upon him. Had she never come to Linne Castle, he felt sure that the property, together with the tumble-down edifice, would have been his; but she had come between himself and his uncle, and robbed him of all.

"The girl may go to the devil as far as I am concerned, and the sooner she goes the better; but one thing is certain —I must have the money, and I mean to have it. But how am I to arrange it so far as to make all right?"

To Linne's mind by far the easier

way would have been marriage, for though he cared little more for the girl than she cared for him, he thought it would look better to take her over with the property. When he could stand well in the eyes of the world without personal loss or inconvenience, he liked to do so. By carrying out that arrangement he could not be accused even of mercenary motives, since he would be acting in strict accordance with his uncle's will. Besides, it would be so much safer. Once married to Marjorie, no one would dare to question his right to every penny of her fortune. With the other arrangements it was different. A hundred objections might be made when the thing became known, and in the mean time his debts were closing round him like the waters of the ocean, and threatened to sink him unless he obtained timely aid.

"Well, if she won't do one thing she must the other," he said, at last. "I shall take the property, let the lawyers say what they will."

When Marjorie saw him in the morning, he looked so pale and haggard that she pitied him.

"Are you not well, Mr. Edward?" she said.

"I am decidedly out of sorts with all this worry," he answered. "Why need it be, Marjorie?"

The girl hung her head, but did not answer.

"Are you still of the same mind you were last night?" he asked.

"Yes," returned Marjorie, softly.

"You still absolutely refuse to marry me?"

"I cannot marry you."

"Then I suppose it is no use to say more about it?"

"It would not be of any use," returned the girl.

"Very well. I have thought it over, and I think I have hit upon a plan. You hand me over the property that has been left to you, and in return I give you Linne Castle, or 'Castle Hunger,' as they call it here, I think, and a small income to keep it up."

"Do you not wish to keep the Castle?"

"No. What would be the use of it to me? I would never live in it. I hate the hole! But you don't hate it, do you?"

"Ah no, indeed!"

"Then you are satisfied with that?"

"Quite satisfied."

"That's all right. I will make out rough drafts of the papers to-day, and you can sign them. There is no need for lawyers, you know, when we are both agreed."

"There is one thing," said Marjorie, suddenly.

"What is that?"

"If the laird's son should be living, and is ever found, you will give up all to him, just as I should have done?"

Linne laughed bitterly.

"If he ever comes, I will; but you know he is lying, or rather his bones are lying, at the bottom of the sea."

If he took this view of the case, Marjorie was content to take it, since she believed, from all she could gather, that it was the true one. So, without waiting to discuss the matter further, she set off to tell the news to her friend the hermit.

"Mr. Macgillvray!" she cried, bursting delightedly into the cave, "it's all over. I have done it!"

"Bless my soul!" cried Willie; "is

the lassie daft? What's over? What have you done?"

"I have told Mr. Edward that I cannot marry him; but that he may have the property!"

"Weel, and how has it ended? What did Mr. Edward do? Did he agree to take the money?"

"Of course he did!"

"And do you think you have done wisely, my bairn?"

"Certainly I have. I could not have married him, because I did not love him."

"Then, since you are so certain o' that, ye ken weel what love is, Marjorie," said the old man, eyeing her fixedly. "Is there no other laddie that's taken your heart?"

Marjorie felt her cheeks grow crimson beneath the old man's steady gaze.

"Don't talk foolishness, Mr. Macgillvray," said the girl, uneasily.

But the old man suddenly leaped up like one demented, crying—

"Come out, you limmer, come out! and take her in your arms, for she loves you, and is free!"

The next moment Marjorie found herself struggling in a strong man's embrace.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"SPIRAT ADHUC AMOR."

FRIGHTENED and almost fainting, Marjorie struggled in the arms of the young Canadian who, with bright eyes and burning cheeks, looked at the old hermit as if for guidance. As for Macgillvray, he seemed like a man gone demented. Laughing and crying, and waving his arms, he leaped up and down the cave, and then, smacking his palms together, cried—

"I'm a matchmaker, I'm a matchmaker! Man, I saw the cupids dancing in her een when I named your name. Hold her fast, ye limmer, for she's yours, she's yours!"

This wild harangue called Marjorie to her senses. Flushed and angry, she shook herself free from the young man's embrace, and stood, panting, indignant, ready to burst into tears.

"It is shameful!" she cried. "You have no right to serve me so, Mr. Macgillvray; and as for *you*, sir,"—here she flashed her eyes at Roberts—"it was cowardly to listen!"

"Forgive me," Roberts answered, gently and penitently.

"Toots, toots, laddie, speak up till her," chuckled the hermit. "That's no' the way to win a lassie!"

"Mr. Macgillvray, for shame!" cried poor Marjorie. "I will never speak to you again."

"I see what it is," said Willie, slyly. "I was wrong. Women are like cattle, and I see she still hungers after the flesh-pots of Egypt. Let her go! Edward Linne's waiting for her with a wedding ring."

"How unkind you are!" returned Marjorie, almost sobbing. "Did I not tell you that I will never, never marry Mr. Edward? But I will do my duty. I shall give back to him all the money that is not mine, and leave this place for ever!"

"And who'll take care of ye? Who'll shelter ye, my lamb, from the storm? Be advised. Keep the siller, and take the heir into the bargain."

"I thought you a good man," said Marjorie, indignantly. "Now I see I was mistaken. I will take neither Mr. Edward nor the money. I would rather die!"

Willie, who seemed positively reckless, was about to speak to her again in the same irritating tone of exultation, when, with a wave of the hand, Roberts made him silent.

"Leave us together," he said.

"No, no, you shall not," cried Marjorie, as Macgillvray moved towards the door. "I will not stay!"

"I will not keep you long," said Roberts, in a gravely gentle tone very unusual with him. "If you wish it, after I have said only a few words, I will shake hands with you for ever!"

Startled by the tone as much as by the words, she hesitated. In a moment Macgillvray slipped out of the cave and disappeared.

"Miss Marjorie," said the young man, in the same solemn tone, "if I am compelled to break the promise I gave you, it is through no fault of mine. The ice has been broken by accident. May I go on?"

"What do you wish to say?" murmured Marjorie, hiding her face and fairly crying.

"I was not playing the spy; but coming to the cave, and not knowing

you were here, I heard some fragments of your conversation; the rest of the truth I knew already. You have resolved to make a great sacrifice?"

"It is no sacrifice," said the girl, sobbing.

"If you refuse to marry Edward Linne, you lose everything, or nearly everything, in the world; is that no sacrifice? Well, your own conscience is your best guide. But if you resign all this world's wealth, how will you live, and where will you go?"

She did not answer, and he continued—

"You are a child, and do not know the world. You have never known what it is to be poor. If you make this sacrifice, the world will laugh at you as a simpleton; your very friends will forsake you."

"I do not care; I will do as God bids me. Now, let me go!"

"One moment yet," said Roberts gently, detaining her by the hand. "Suppose I were to say to you, as I said before in my mad boldness—'Marjorie, I love you; you are dearer to me a thousandfold now you are poor than when you were rich; leave this place—come with me to the west, where I can

offer you a poor but loving home,—what would be your reply?"

"I do not know," she faltered, looking at him through her tears. "Oh, do you not see how troubled I am? I scarcely understand; and you promised——"

"I will keep my promise henceforth, if you wish it. Say the word, and I will never trouble you again. Tell me you do not love me, that you can never love me, and I will go away for ever!"

He paused as if awaiting her reply. Their eyes met. He caught her in his arms again.

"Let me go," she cried, blushing through her tears. "You must not—I shall be angry."

He released her in a moment.

"I know I am selfish. Fondly as I love you, I know I have nothing to recommend me. If you were wise—and it is not too late—you would keep the position in which the laird placed you, and fulfil his dying wish."

"His only wish was to keep the lands together," she replied. "Mr. Edward will have them all; and that was all the laird's desire—that they should remain in the family."

"Let me be frank with you," said Roberts. "In asking you to marry me, I ask you to join your lot with one who is little better than a peasant, and as poor as a shepherd on your lands."

"I should not care for that," said Marjorie; adding, as she saw he was about to encroach again, "But I'm not thinking of marrying at all!"

"I understand. You realize the wild life you would have to lead out yonder, you who are a lady born!"

"I am no lady," returned Marjorie, simply. "The laird adopted me out of charity, and my father and mother were poor and humble."

"I am glad of that; but, by heaven, there is no lady in the land worthy to tie your shoe-strings. Oh, my darling," he cried, passionately, "are we to part? Am I to go forth in the world a lonely man, without one word or look of love from her I have loved since we first met?"

"How can you love me so much," said Marjorie, "when we have known each other so short a time? I am sure you do not mean what you say!"

"I am a rough man, I know," he

answered; "but I speak out of the fulness of my heart. The breath I breathe, the world I dwell in, the blue heaven up yonder, the very God I worship, are nothing to me without you! You are more to me than life itself!"

Marjorie looked into his face. Never had it seemed so beautiful as now, when the very sun of love shone there. She seemed caught as in a golden fire, and lost all self-command.

"Marjorie!" he cried, holding out his arms.

With a blush and a sigh, she sank into them, and hid her face upon his breast.

"Hooly and fairly!" cried a voice. "What's up now? This lassie is wanted at the Castle!"

They looked round. There, on the threshold of the cave, stood that irritating hermit, grinning from ear to ear, and rubbing his hands together gleefully. Red as a rose, Marjorie disengaged herself, and gave him a glance of smiling indignation.

"You were so long talking," he said, "that I wearied. Weel, have you said good-bye?"

"No, old friend," answered Roberts; "we have come to an amicable agreement;" and, as he spoke, he took Marjorie round the waist and kissed her gently.

"It's sheer foolishness," chuckled Willie. "She's a pauper, and you're a beggar!"

"Exactly," said Roberts; "but we mean to make a fresh start together."

"Ridiculous! It's against the first principles o' political economy — see Malthus *passim*. Bless me, ye'll be for marrying next, and having a family!"

"Please don't talk such nonsense!" said Marjorie, with a blush.

"The foolishness o' women! The selfishness o' men! Marjorie, this saucy gallant—Mr. Impudence, as I call him—has scarce a bawbee in his pouch, or a shirt till his back!"

"I like him all the better for that," said Marjorie.

"Say ye so?—then I'll talk to *him*. Young limmer, I bid you release this young lady, and gang about your business. She's a beggar like yourself!"

"That's just why I want her," said Roberts.

"Was ever such a daft pair!" cried Willie, regarding them with delighted admiration. "What are ye going to *live* on, tell me that?"

"We shall live on love, sir," returned Roberts, suiting the action to the word, and kissing Marjorie again.

"That's but a lean diet," retorted the hermit.

"How do you *know*, sir?" broke in Marjorie. "You are only an old bachelor, and have never tried it!"

Thereupon, from the happiness of their hearts, all three laughed outright. It was a pleasant ending to an eventful evening. They sat down round the fire of the little hermitage, and talked long and earnestly together.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A THUNDERCLAP!

DESPITE the quietness with which the amicable arrangements between Linne and Marjorie had been carried out, they somehow or other soon became known. At all events, in an incredibly short

space of time the news of the changes reached the ears of Mr. Menzies, the family solicitor. One morning, Linne and Marjorie received letters from the old gentleman, announcing his intention to visit Linne Castle next day, and requesting them both to be ready to see him.

The receipt of the letter had no effect on Marjorie, who had seemed to be wonderfully contented and happy since the day when the new arrangement was made; but it made Edward Linne furious. He looked up savagely from the letter, and encountered Marjorie's placid gaze.

"Is *your* letter from that old fool?" he asked.

"It is from Mr. Menzies."

"Then you know he is coming. Do you know what he is coming for?"

"I suppose," answered Marjorie, quietly, "he has heard about my giving you the money."

"Yes; and he is coming to question my right to it; but it has nothing to do with him. You have signed the document which made it mine, and you will have to hold to your hand."

"I will hold to it."

"Then Mr. Menzies can't have much to say. Did *you* write and tell him of it?"

"No."

"Then who on earth did?"

"Perhaps Mr. Macgillvray."

"But how the deuce did he know?"

"I told him," said Marjorie, frankly.

"Oh, I see!" he said, with a sneer, "you still cultivate the acquaintance of my uncle's ragged friend. A nice companion for a young lady, truly."

"Don't talk about him; and don't sneer at my guardian," said Marjorie, hotly. "I don't like to hear it."

So Linne was silent; but a few hours later he reverted to the subject again.

"You seem to go pretty often to that hole," he said.

"I may go where I please," returned Marjorie, flushing angrily.

"Look here," he continued, watching her very closely; "I want to ask you a question. You never gave me a proper reason for refusing to marry me."

"I told you I did not love you, and I am sure, now, you do not love me."

"Very frank of you to say that when I have told you that I do. However,

let that pass. Since you find it so utterly impossible to care for me, there is some reason for it. You love another man. May I have the pleasure," he added, with mock courtesy, "of learning the name of this most fortunate person?"

Stung by his sarcasm, Marjorie rose indignantly from her seat.

"I have always tried to do what is right, and I will not let you insult me," she said. "It will be better for us not to meet again, Mr. Edward. I hope you will soon go away, and leave me here alone."

Early next day Marjorie received a summons to go to the library to see Mr. Menzies, who had arrived. She went and found him closeted with Edward Linne.

Since the moment when Marjorie and Linne had parted in anger the two had not met, and now she hardly looked at him, but she gave her hand to the lawyer and sat down near him. The old man put on his spectacles and looked at her curiously.

"You are a very peculiar young lady," he said. "What do you mean by all this?"

Marjorie laughed,

"Mean by what, sir?" she asked.

"Why, by throwing about your money in this way, and making over valuable estates as if they were farthing candles. Bless my soul! it's like turning the world topsy-turvy. Here is a will that it took my old friend the laird several months to think out, calmly cast aside like a straw upon the wind."

"But what could I do, Mr. Menzies?"

"What could you do? Why, keep to the will, of course. What do you suppose these things are made for, if not to be followed?"

"I have carried out my guardian's wish," said Marjorie, firmly.

"Pardon me, my dear young lady, that is just what you have not done."

"He wished," continued the girl, hurriedly and nervously, "to keep the estates all together, and to have them owned by one of his own kin."

"Then why didn't he say so?"

"He did say so very often, to *me*.

"But he did not write it in his will. What he said there was this——"

He produced a copy of the will and seemed about to read from it, when Linne interrupted him.

"This seems to me to be a ridiculous waste of time," he said. "I tell you, Mr. Menzies, everything is settled, and everything is mine. I was perfectly willing to carry out my uncle's wishes. I asked the young lady to marry me, and when she refused to do that she restored to me the property which was mine by right."

"There you make a mistake," said Menzies, sharply; "there is no right in the case. If you, a man of the world, choose to take advantage of an innocent girl, that is another matter."

"It is no use to bandy words about it," cried Linne, "but to discuss common facts. Has this young lady a right, or has she no right, to dispose of her own property?"

"I presume she has a right; the will imposed no restrictions."

"Very good. Then, now that she has signed the necessary documents, the property is legally mine."

"Certainly, if you are the man to take it."

"I merely regard it as restitution of stolen goods," said Linne, assuming an air of insolence now that he knew the

real extent of his power. "But I don't wish to be ungenerous. If the lady likes to change her mind now without more delay, I am still willing to marry her."

"Now, that's uncommon generous," chimed in a voice from the door. "Nothing could be more square!"

Looking up, they saw the young Canadian, standing in the doorway.

"Don't put yourself out, governor," he said, in his old twang, nodding familiarly to Linne, whose face was white with anger. "But I heard you'd got a little family party here, and I thought I'd join."

"Curse your impudence!" cried Linne. "Leave my house!"

"It is not your house, Mr. Edward; it is mine, and he will stay," said Marjorie, quietly, who, however, was as much amazed at this sudden and unexpected apparition as Linne himself.

Roberts gave a laugh and threw his hat on a chair.

"It's as well to have the ladies on your side," he said. "But go on; don't let me interrupt you."

"Really, my dear sir," said the lawyer,

who found his voice at last, "I don't know who you are or what you are doing here."

"Don't you? Well, there's time enough for that, I guess. At present I'm not of much account, you see. But there's one thing I want to have a word in, and that is, the disposal of this young lady."

"What the deuce has it to do with *you?*" cried Linne, aghast.

"Well, she hasn't had quite so many dealings with me as *you* have, but she has told me about this little arrangement, and I think she has been humbugged and misled, and I want to know if you mean to give her her property back?"

"I do not—I cannot," stammered Linne.

"You mean to stick to it, then?"

"Of course I do."

"Come, governor, don't you be mean," said Roberts, slyly. "Say you split the difference, and give her *half?*"

"I tell you the arrangement we have made will be kept. She has refused to marry me——"

"You would have married her? you were ready to marry her?"

"I offered to do it. She cannot deny it."

"And you would have done it, I guess?"

"Yes, I would; certainly."

"Then curse you for a scoundrel!" said Roberts, quite suddenly.

Walking to the window, he waved his hand. The next moment the library door opened again, and a young girl—no other, indeed, than Mary Fleming—stood upon the threshold.

At sight of her, Linne uttered a cry of surprise and fear, and the Canadian, throwing aside his rough manners like an old glove, said, turning to the lawyer—

"Now, sir, you shall see what this man is. Having ruined one life, he was ready to wreck another. This young lass is Edward Linne's wife!"

"But you, sir, who are you?" asked the lawyer, staring amazedly into the young man's face.

Roberts smiled.

"You shall hear all now," he said. "This young lady," taking Marjorie's hand, "has plighted her troth to me; and I am Robert Mossknow, *alias* Campbell, *alias* Roberts; and, unless I'm much mistaken, the lawful heir of Linne."

EPILOGUE.

THE revelation of the young man's identity, which my reader has, no doubt, guessed from the first, came like a thunderclap, even on Marjorie. As for Linne, he was stupefied.

On that sudden tableau the curtain shall fall, for my little dramatic idyll of real life has ended and there is little more to tell,—save that Robert Campbell proved his identity beyond all question; that Edward Linne wandered away from Linne Castle like a beaten hound; and that, within a month, Robert and Marjorie were married in the old castle, by no less a person than the Rev. William Macgillvray, B.D., of the University of Glasgow.

THE END.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 05 October, 2018